

**THE ROLE MENTORING PLAYS IN A WHITE FEMALE NOVICE  
TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS OF HER ENCULTURATION INTO A  
CULTURALLY DIVERSE CAMPUS**

A Dissertation

by

ERICA MICHELLE NOBLE

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2012

Major Subject: Educational Administration

The Role Mentoring Plays in a White Female Novice Teacher's Perceptions of Her  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The Role Mentoring Plays in a White Female Novice Teacher's Perceptions of Her  
Enculturation into a Culturally Diverse Campus. (May 2012)

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Many of America's schools are populated with diverse student populations, while the teaching population remains largely White. This creates dissonance for White teachers and students of color. Possibly mentoring can assist novice White teachers as they enculturate into the profession and their culturally diverse campuses. This qualitative research, conducted from an Interpretivism paradigm, used a case study of a White female novice teacher at a culturally diverse campus to understand the role mentoring played in a White female novice teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus. Several methods of data collection were used, including 9 semi-structured interviews with the novice teacher, email dialogues, 3 days of shadowing, as well as two semi-structured interviews with the subject's principal and mentor. The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method.

This White female novice teacher taught at a campus with a large Hispanic student population. She struggled to feel confident in her work and in her relationships with her mentor, her fellow teachers, her administrators, her students and their parents.

She relied heavily on her faith and her fellow novice teacher and teammate. Her mentor visited her once a week. She liked her mentor, but never felt she received the assistance desired. She recognized she knew little about the Hispanic culture of her students; she was willing to learn more, but failed to see her own privileged membership in the dominant White culture and its effect on interactions with her students.

The discussion of this study looks at the structuring of an effective mentoring program for novice teachers, and the new teacher's frustrations with the mentoring received; her relationship struggles with her principal and other staff, but also some successes in forming friendly relationships; her desire to understand her Hispanic students and their culture, yet her inability to see her membership in the dominant culture, as well as her school and district's "color-blind" approach to race; and her perceptions of her enculturation into the profession of teaching. The conclusions of this study discuss mentoring new teachers, the role of principals in the induction of new teachers, cultural differences between teachers and students, and the influence of faith and character with a teacher and his/her teaching.

## **DEDICATION**

To my wonderful, loving husband Jason, and my beautiful children: Emma, Hannah,  
Jonathan, and William. To God be the glory!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

According to the Psalm 108:13, "With God's help we will do mighty things." I could not have done this dissertation if it were not for my great and mighty God. This is the work He prepared for me to do in advance. As He was knitting me together in my mother's womb, He prepared me for this task, graciously giving me intelligence and the ability to write; but at times I felt so weak and helpless and thought that I could not finish this dissertation. He lovingly reminded me that when I am weak, then He is strong, and with Him working in me He would give me the desire and power to do what pleased Him. He told me to be strong and courageous and to not be afraid, for He would go with me each and every day, as He remained faithful and never left me nor forsook me. Throughout this process He held me in His righteous right hand and with His power working in me, He did much more than I could possibly imagine, for His glory for all eternity. He gave me a wonderful husband, who loved me, encouraged me, believed in me, and helped me through every step. He gave me beautiful children, who loved me, encouraged me, and faithfully prayed for me. He gave me loving and supportive parents who helped me in countless ways. He gave me the opportunity to study at a wonderful university, with knowledgeable and competent professors. He gave me Dr. Skrla, who was so patient with me and helped me produce a quality product. He gave me a wonderful sister, Jennifer, who was my companion throughout our coursework and always willing to drive the many miles to College Station. He gave me a wonderfully compliant research subject who is now a great friend and sister in Christ. He gave me a

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A significant number of teachers leave the profession within the first three to five years (Hunt & Carroll, 2003). Some teachers may leave because they feel as if they never properly enculturate into campus life. Campus enculturation refers to a teacher's feelings of acceptance, success, and value, specifically in relation to her interactions with her students, her fellow teachers, and her administrators. Focusing on these interactions and a teacher's retention leads to the question: what are a teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into campus life within her first year of teaching?

In answering the previously stated question, it is necessary to address the complex nature of contemporary schools. Schools today are developing into culturally diverse campuses, but our teaching force is not. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), during the 2007-2008 school year 83.5 percent of our nation's teachers were White, while 44.2 percent of the nation's students were students from racial and ethnic groups other than White (NCES, 2009). The number of students of color continues to increase and these statistics are even more telling in some of our nation's states. In the state of Texas, for example, in the 2009-2010 school year, students of color constituted 66 percent of the student population; while, teachers of color only comprised about 33 percent of the teacher population (Texas Education Association

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This dissertation follows the style of *Educational Administration Quarterly*.

[TEA], 2010). This leads to an obvious imbalance in the ratio of White teachers to students of color. If approximately 67 percent of Texas' teachers are White and 66 percent of students are from racial and ethnic groups other than White (TEA, 2010) then many White teachers will teach at campuses with a significant number of students of color. Cultural differences may give rise to complications for White teachers trying to fully enculturate into campus life at culturally diverse campuses. Furthermore, public school teachers often leave campuses whose student populations contain a high percentage of students of color (Shen, 1998). It would be useful to know, then, how a White female teacher's perceptions of her interactions with her students of color affects her enculturation into campus life.

Furthermore, knowing that White teachers are likely to teach students from ethnic groups other than White, it is important, then, to focus on how schools help these teachers learn to interact effectively with students from different racial and ethnic groups. This is often done through mentoring. Mentoring is important to the enculturation process of any teacher during the first year (Johnson, 2001); moreover, "Mentoring as a part of teaching and learning can help beginning teachers in urban schools address the history, experiences, and learning styles of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds" (Tillman, 2003, p. 227). So we must ask, what role does mentoring play in a White female novice teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus?

## **Review of Literature**

In seeking to understand the role mentoring plays in the perceptions a White female novice teacher has of her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus it is important to look at what the existing research says about a White educator and a culturally diverse campus, the role of mentoring for novice teachers, campus enculturation for teachers, and teacher retention. Below I discuss these topics as they relate to this phenomenon.

### **White educator and a culturally diverse campus**

According to one researcher, “The culture of urban schools often present a teaching and learning context that is different from what might be found in suburban schools” (Tillman, 2005, p. 612). White educators teach students whose cultural backgrounds differ from their own (Howard, 2003). Teachers working in inner city schools often feel alienated from their students that are from a different race and class than the teacher (Griffith & London, 1980). In one study, a participant discussed her feelings of “emotional dissonance” when contrasting her views of teaching prior to working at an inner city school and with her experience and views afterwards (Rushton, 2003). In another study, a participant was shocked when her experience with teaching in an inner city school differed from earlier working experiences (Rushton, 2004). When novice teachers come to work at campuses where the students’ culture varies from their own, then “Specific cultural support should be provided ... [to] prepare them emotionally to deal with the new environment” (Abu Rass, 2010, p.52), so the novice teacher can begin to understand her students’ cultural background. Griffith and London

(1980) recognized that, “The barriers that exist do not have to exist” (p. 144). These barriers can be removed when a teacher is able to critically reflect on his/her personal beliefs, opinions, and values about racial identity (Howard, 2003). According to one researcher a teacher could do a critical reflection by asking him/herself the following questions:

- 1) How will my race influence my work as a teacher with students of color?
- 2) How might my students’ racial experiences influence their work with me as the teacher?
- 3) What is the impact of race on my beliefs?
- 4) How do I, as a teacher situate myself in the education of others, and how do I negotiate the power structures around race in my class to allow students to feel a sense of worth?
- 5) How might racial influences impact my students’ interests in the classroom and how might I connect lessons to those interests?
- 6) How do I situate and negotiate the students’ knowledge, experiences, expertise, and race with my own?
- 7) Am I willing to speak about race on behalf of those who might not be present in the conversation both inside and outside of school, and am I willing to express the injustices of racism in conservative spaces? (Milner, 2003, p. 178)

As a teacher works to alter his/her beliefs and practices he/she cannot forget about differences in culture and race (Howard, 2003); furthermore, the teacher cannot be trapped into thinking that “color-blindness” is the answer – failure to see color at all is

not beneficial to anyone; it only perpetuates the current system of White dominance and ignores the needs of students of color (Gordon, 2005). Teaching in a culturally diverse school provides teachers the opportunity to confront their racial beliefs. Those who wrestle with their beliefs about race have the opportunity to learn, but with some pain, conflict, and loss (Howard, 1999). Many teachers are unaware of their unconscious beliefs and attitudes towards students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds and how those beliefs influence their teaching (Delpit, 2006). When working with students from non-White ethnic groups, the White educator needs to increase his or her own consciousness and assumptions about race in schools. One author said, “When those of us from the dominant culture do not recognize how our culture is embedded in our languages, actions, and values, we implicitly and sometimes explicitly ask ‘those who have culture’ to check it at the door” (Rose-Cohen, 2004, p. 38).

Some believe that teacher training programs, in an effort to produce highly qualified teachers, must prepare a teacher to appreciate the cultural experiences that students bring to class and be ready to teach a diverse student population (Futrell, 2004). In one study of pre-service teachers and their work at an inner city school, one of the participants expressed her belief that nothing could have prepared her for her experience (Rushton, 2003). The cultural capital that racially diverse students bring to the classroom differs from the mainstream views (Howard, 2003); teachers need to reach out and teach these students (Griffith & London, 1980) and abandon the “deficit-based” thinking they hold about culturally diverse students (Howard, 2003). “As White educators, we cannot fully know or experience the struggles of our students and



colleagues of color, but we can work to create an empathetic environment in which their stories and experiences can be acknowledged and shared,” (Howard, 1999, p. 75). Is it possible to prepare teachers for this experience? Some believe that experienced teachers need to be allowed the time to work with new teachers for this purpose (Futrell).

### **Role of mentoring**

Novice teachers enter the field of education with a variety of experiences and the nurturing of novice teachers is essential for teacher induction – this can be achieved with mentoring. As a mentor creates a caring atmosphere with the novice, the novice in turn will create a caring atmosphere in his/her own classroom (Blair-Larson & Bercik, 1992). One novice teacher felt that her university training did not prepare her for coping with the issues in an inner-city school – one might deduce that having a caring and nurturing mentor might provide more foundation for this teacher (Rushton, 2004). Rushton (2004) continued with saying,

Fieldwork can lead to a miserable experience and leave a sense of abject failure ... there is much room for improvement ... mentoring teachers might learn from this experience to remind themselves of just how much influence they have on young aspiring teachers. (p. 77)

Including mentoring as a part of teacher induction for teachers in urban schools helps novice teachers learn to address the experiences students from different racial and ethnic groups bring (Tillman, 2003). A mentor helps the novice to realize his/her own identities about race, ethnicity, and social class (Howard, 2003).

The mentor is one of the first people that a novice teacher interacts with at the school. Mentoring teachers have an influential role in the development of novice teachers (Rushton, 2003). It is essential that this relationship is positive for the novice teacher. In one study of pre-service teachers in urban schools, the majority of the participants described their relationship with their mentor as positive and viewed working with their mentors as very important to their development (Thompson & Smith, 2004). A mentor functions to transmit formal knowledge of skills, to teach the rules, values, and ethics of education, and should seek to encourage and praise the novice teacher to build their confidence (Cross, 1995). The quality of the mentor and novice teacher relationship is very important in the induction process (Rippon & Martin, 2003). This relationship is important because the mentor is the liaison between the mentee and the rest of the staff (Cross).

### **Campus enculturation**

Mentoring assists novice teachers as they adapt to school culture (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004). Mentors need to provide opportunities for the novice teacher to interact with other staff members and help socialize the novice teacher to the school culture (Rippon & Martin, 2003). As the novice teacher “comes to terms” with the school culture he/she begins to enculturate into the school (Tillman, 2003). The mentor aids this by encouraging other staff members to be supportive and welcoming to the novice (Cross, 1995). Also, a mentor assists the new teacher with her enculturation with her students as the mentor helps the novice develop strategies for working with diverse students (Fletcher & Barrett). The mentor’s guidance is key to a novice teacher’s

development of interpersonal relations with students, administrators, staff, and parents (Tillman), therefore helping the novice with his/her enculturation into campus life. Teachers find social satisfaction when they are satisfied in their relationships with colleagues (Cheng, 1994). The novice teacher needs to view him/herself as a member of the school (Tillman). His/her clothing and activities should adapt to fit the culture (Roshton, 2003). At a culturally diverse campus this may be more difficult for a novice teacher because she may not relate to her students on a cultural level and it takes time for a teacher to adjust to the diverse backgrounds of the students, their families, and the school culture (Tillman). When his/her relationships with students, teachers, and parents become familiar a novice begins to better understand the culture of a school (Roshton, 2003). As a novice teacher works with his/her mentor, interacts with the administration and other staff members they begin to enculturate into campus life, but if they fail to do this, they may be likely to leave (Fletcher & Barrett).

### **Teacher retention**

As one pre-service teacher worked with inner-city schools, struggling with her enculturation into the campus life, she began to wonder if she made the right decision pursuing a teaching career (Roshton, 2003). Novice educators need to hear from their mentor, principal, and other faculty that they are valued and needed (Johnson, 2001). When considering the cost of a mentoring program – time, money, energy, – the value is priceless if it helps keep good teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Schools with high numbers of students from ethnic groups other than White tend to have lower retention rates (Shen, 1998). With any school setting, including urban areas, good teachers stay at

schools where they believe they are appreciated and supported (Darling-Hammond). Concerns of novice teachers need to be addressed because schools cannot afford to lose good teachers (Johnson), especially schools with high numbers of students of color. Teacher attrition disrupts the learning process and weakens the bond between teachers and students – especially students at inner-city schools (Shen, 1998). When asked, a group of university students, at graduation, said they had high expectations for their relationships with their future colleagues – they were deflated when they perceived that their administrators did not seem to care or support them - if novice teachers continue to feel this way they will leave (Johnson). “Too many good teachers are leaving before they have had a chance at much of a beginning” (Johnson, p 45).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Today as the student populations in our schools grow more racially and ethnically diverse, while our teaching population remains largely White, for the benefit of both students and teachers it is important that we, as a profession, work to help new teachers fully enculturate into the profession. This involves not only preparing them to work as professionals but to assist them in understanding their students, their cultural backgrounds, and how this impacts instruction and learning. This can be done through effective mentoring, and that is why there needs to be more research focused on how mentoring affects the perceptions White female novice teachers have of their enculturation into culturally diverse campuses. The analysis and discussion on the matter can further our understanding of how mentoring affects the perceptions a new White female teacher has of her enculturation into her culturally diverse campus, so that

we can improve on these activities, easing the enculturation of these teachers, and ultimately improving their instructional practices and the learning outcomes of all students.

### **Purpose**

Mentoring may help White novice teachers better enculturate into campus life at schools whose populations consist of a significant number of students from racial and ethnic groups other than White; furthermore, by helping White novice teachers enculturate into their campuses, it may help these teachers increase their positive perceptions of their interactions with students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and their success as teachers. So then, the purpose of this study is to see the role mentoring plays in a White female teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into campus life at a culturally diverse campus, during her first year of teaching.

### **Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following questions in regards to addressing the purpose of understanding how a new White teacher perceives her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus.

1. What are a White female novice teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into campus life within her first year of teaching?
2. How does a White female novice teacher perceive her interactions with her students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and how does she interpret these interactions in relationship to her perception of her enculturation into campus life?

3. What role does the White female novice teacher perceive that mentoring plays in her perceptions of her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus?

## **Methods**

### **Research paradigm**

To answer these questions and to grasp a fuller understanding of this particular phenomenon, I chose to do a qualitative study because I wanted to understand a White female novice teacher's perception of her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus "with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible," (Merriam, 1998, p. 5), because "meaning is embedded in people's experiences," (p. 6). I conducted this qualitative research through a case study because, as Merriam (1998) said, "A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. ... Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research," (p.19). I focused on this single phenomenon, a single unit, in hopes to provide an in-depth description of the phenomenon of a White female novice teacher at a culturally diverse campus, so as to provide better insight and understanding involved in this phenomenon, as is the nature of a case study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998; Merriam, 2002). As with other types of studies done in this manner, I observed, interviewed, dialogued, and reflected, to make this phenomenon a part of myself and then tell this story of this White female novice teacher, teaching at a culturally diverse campus (Josselson, 1995).

I chose to work from an interpretivism paradigm because I was interested in finding meaning and understanding in how this White female teacher made sense of and

interpreted her experience as a first year teacher at a culturally diverse campus; and an interpretivism paradigm allows for that (Merriam, 1994). I did this by immersing myself into the context during my observations, and engaging in a dialogue with this first year teacher through interviews and emails, as interpretive studies involve engaging in this type of dialogue to understand the phenomenon (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997). I served as the primary instrument for data collection as I interviewed, email dialogued, and observed my subject, methods often used in this type of study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam 1994).

### **Site and participant selection**

As this was a qualitative study from an interpretivism paradigm, this influenced the site and participant selection process. As Merriam (1998) suggests for qualitative research, the participant selection was “nonrandom, purposeful, and small” (p. 8). The participant was chosen because she was a White female first year teacher teaching at a culturally diverse campus, and she had a mentor. To find this participant, I contacted the superintendent of a school district that had a student population largely comprised of students of color, in this case Hispanic, and a district that also provided mentors for their novice teachers. The campus chosen was a fifth grade center located in a suburban school, outside of a large metropolitan area in Texas. The student population of the campus was close to 85 percent Hispanic, with many of those students being economically disadvantaged. The teacher had a mentor teacher, who came to her campus once a week.

### **Data collection**

To fully understand and grasp meaning from this White female novice teacher's experience at this campus, I used several methods for data collection. I, the researcher, served as the primary instrument for data collection and sought to acquire the data in ways that included the participant's own words, through semi-structured interviews and email dialogues, as well as field notes generated from my observations to gain an in-depth understanding, which are methods used when conducting this type of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998). Also, it is important to understand my personal biases because I served as the primary instrument for this data collection. As some suggest, as the primary instrument for data collection my personal biases influence my perceptions and interpretations (Merriam). As a new teacher, myself, I received mentoring from experienced teachers my first two years of teaching. I also served as a mentor to two novice teachers during two of my years of teaching, and I worked as teacher mentor at a charter school in Texas, mentoring several new teachers over the course of one school year. My experiences with these situations influenced my perceptions of the phenomenon studied here.

The study took place over the course of a school year. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the novice teacher at least once a month, each lasting one-two hours. These interviews were recorded and transcribed. I also shadowed or observed the teacher for a full school day (seven hours) three times during the course of the year, which produced field notes. In addition to shadowing the teacher and interviewing her, we communicated regularly through a journaling dialogue via email. Two additional



semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teacher's mentor and principal, one interview each. These interviews were recorded and transcribed. Throughout the study, I, as the researcher, kept a private journal (not to be shared with the novice teacher) of my experience and thoughts about the case.

### **Data analysis**

To analyze the data obtained through these multiple methods of data collection, described above, I conducted the analysis process throughout the course of the study using the constant comparative method by Glaser and Strauss as cited in *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (Merriam, 1998, p. 159).

Throughout the process I constantly compared the data from each interview, email, and observation with the data from the previous interviews, emails, and observations; thorough analysis of each data collection, informed the following interviews, emails, and observations (Merriam). Following each contact experience, I discovered new issues that needed to be addressed in a future interview or in the email journaling, conducted between the novice teacher and myself. After each interview, I looked for emerging categories. I sought clarification from the interviewee at our next interview on any items that were unclear to me or that needed more attention and I formulated questions for our future interviews based on our previous interviews and email dialogues.

After each day of shadowing, I went through the field notes of my observations to again look for emerging categories; I combined this data with the data from our interviews. As we dialogued through weekly journaling, I took highlights from the journals - to look for categories - and compared these to the categories generated from

the interviews and the shadowing. As I read through the different sources of data and the emerging categories, I searched for emerging themes. I then began to group the data into these themes. Some questions that began to arise included: Is the new teacher receiving the help and support she desires from her mentor? How is she feeling about her relationship with her students and their parents? How does the new teacher feel about her relationship with her administrators? How does the new teacher feel about her relationship with fellow staff members? How does the new teacher feel about her teaching overall? As I analyzed the information produced from our contacts I compared that to the thoughts in my private journal. As more questions occurred, I sought clarification from the novice teacher. The emerging themes in the data included the new teacher's thoughts about her relationship with her mentor, her administrators, her fellow staff members, her students and their parents, and how she felt about teacher overall. After I categorized the data and divided it up into themes, I began to tell the story of this White female novice teacher.

### **Trustworthiness**

It is important that this story is told in a trustworthy manner. To ensure trustworthiness – the validity and reliability of this study - I implored several strategies, as described by Merriam (1998, 2002) in *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* and *Qualitative Research in Practice*. I had prolonged engagement as I studied the teacher over the course of a school year. I conducted member checks by clarifying the data with the participant after my analysis and reflection of each interview, email, and observation. By using multiple methods of data

collection: interviews, email dialogues, field notes from observations, and researcher's journal, I triangulated the data. In terms of typicality, often new teachers receive mentoring from veteran teachers, and it is not uncommon for a White teacher to teach students of color, at culturally diverse campuses. For peer examination, at least two educational researchers read and examined this study and its completed presentation.

### **Significance**

This study is important because as the number of students of color rises in the nation, more White educators face the challenge of teaching and interacting with students who come from cultural backgrounds differing from their own. The conclusions of this study may assist mentors in helping White novice educators in learning to work with students of color. The study may also assist White novice educators with their awareness of how their cultural backgrounds affect their teaching and their interactions with students. If White educators struggle with teaching students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds they may be tempted to leave the profession. As they grow in their awareness of their cultural biases, they may - in turn - grow in their interactions with students of color; thus, improving their teaching and consequently the education of their students. Also, as cited earlier, "Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). The conclusions of this study may help district and campus administrators in the organization of an effective mentoring program based on the needs and desires of a new teacher.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

Schools today grow more diverse as the student population increases with the number of students of color, while the teaching force remains largely White. Schools with diverse student populations often struggle to retain teachers as many new teachers are not prepared to work on campuses with large numbers of diverse students. These teachers remain largely unaware of how the cultural differences existing between them and their students greatly impacts instruction and their interactions with their students. This study addresses how a White female novice teacher perceives her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus while examining her perceptions of her relationships with the other staff, her mentor, the students and their parents. In this study I hope to provide insight into the importance of mentoring new teachers and their enculturation into the profession and campus life, especially those who teach at culturally diverse campuses.

I conducted a qualitative study, from an interpretivism paradigm, by doing a case study of a White female novice teacher at a culturally diverse campus. I used multiple methods of data collection including semi-structured interviews, email dialogues, and observations by shadowing the subject for three full school days. I also interviewed her mentor and her principal. I used the constant comparative method for data analysis. By conducting a study of a first year teacher over the course of a school year I was able to gain a richer understanding of her first year of teaching. Hopefully the insights gained through this study will impact White teachers and their work with students of color, mentors and their work with new teachers, and ultimately the students and their education experience.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A significant number of teachers leave the profession within the first three to five years (Hunt & Carroll, 2003). Some teachers may leave because they feel as if they never properly enculturate into campus life. Campus enculturation refers to a teacher's feelings of acceptance, success, and value, specifically in relation to her interactions with her students, her fellow teachers, and her administrators. Focusing on these interactions and a teacher's retention leads to the question: what are a teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into campus life within her first year of teaching?

In answering the previously stated question, it is necessary to address the complex nature of contemporary schools. Schools today are developing into culturally diverse campuses, but our teaching force is not. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, during the 2007-2008 school year 83.5 percent of our nation's teachers were White, while 44.2 percent of the nation's students were students from racial and ethnic groups other than White (NCES, 2009). The number of students of color continues to increase and these statistics are even more telling in some of our nation's states. In the state of Texas, for example, in the 2009-2010 school year, students of color constituted about 66 percent of the student population; while, teachers of color only comprised about thirty-three percent of the teacher population (TEA, 2010). This leads to an obvious imbalance in the ratio of White teachers to students of color. If approximately 67 percent of Texas' teachers are White and 66 percent of

students are from racial and ethnic groups other than white (TEA, 2010) then many White teachers will teach at campuses with a significant number of students of color. Cultural differences may give rise to complications for White teachers trying to fully enculturate into campus life at culturally diverse campuses. Furthermore, public school teachers often leave campuses whose student populations contain a high percentage of students of color (Shen, 1998). It would be useful to know, then, how a White female teacher's perceptions of her interactions with her students of color affects her enculturation into campus life.

Knowing that White teachers are likely to teach non-White students, it is important, then, to focus on how schools help these teachers learn to interact effectively with students from other ethnic backgrounds. This is often done through mentoring. Mentoring is important to the enculturation process of any teacher during the first year (Johnson, 2001); moreover, "Mentoring as a part of teaching and learning can help beginning teachers in urban schools address the history, experiences, and learning styles of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds" (Tillman, 2003, p. 227). So we must ask, what role does mentoring play in a White female novice teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus?

Mentoring may help White novice teachers better enculturate into campus life at schools whose populations consist of a significant number of non-White students; furthermore, by helping White novice teachers enculturate into their campuses, these teachers may increase their positive perceptions of their interactions with students from other racial and ethnic backgrounds and their success as teachers. So then, the purpose

of this study is to see the role mentoring plays in a White female teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into campus life at a culturally diverse campus, during her first year of teaching.

### **White Educator and a Culturally Diverse Campus**

According to one researcher, "The culture of urban schools often present a teaching and learning context that is different from what might be found in suburban schools" (Tillman, 2005, p. 612). White educators teach students whose cultural backgrounds differ from their own (Howard, 2003). Teachers working in inner city schools often feel alienated from their students that are from a different race and class than the teacher (Griffith & London, 1980). In one study a participant discussed her feelings of "emotional dissonance" when contrasting her views of teaching prior to working at an inner city school and with her experience and views afterwards (Rushton, 2003). In another study a participant was shocked when her experience with teaching in an inner city school differed from earlier working experiences (Rushton, 2004). When novice teachers come to work at campuses where the students' culture varies from their own then, "Specific cultural support should be provided ... [to] prepare them emotionally to deal with the new environment" (Abu Rass, 2010, p. 52), so the novice teacher can begin to understand her students' cultural background. Griffith and London (1980) recognized that, "The barriers that exist do not have to exist" (p. 144). These barriers can be removed when a teacher is able to critically reflect on his/her personal beliefs, opinions, and values about racial identity (Howard, 2003). According to one

researcher a teacher could do a critical reflection by asking him/herself the following questions:

- 1) How will my race influence my work as a teacher with students of color?
- 2) How might my students' racial experiences influence their work with me as the teacher?
- 3) What is the impact of race on my beliefs?
- 4) How do I, as a teacher, situate myself in the education of others, and how do I negotiate the power structures around race in my class to allow students to feel a sense of worth?
- 5) How might racial influences impact my students' interests in the classroom and how might I connect lessons to those interests?
- 6) How do I situate and negotiate the students' knowledge, experiences, expertise, and race with my own?
- 7) Am I willing to speak about race on behalf of those who might not be present in the conversation both inside and outside of school, and am I willing to express the injustices of racism in conservative spaces? (Milner, 2003, p. 178)

As a teacher works to alter his or her beliefs and practices they cannot forget about differences in culture and race (Howard, 2003); furthermore, the teacher cannot be trapped into thinking that “color-blindness” is the answer – failure to see color at all is not beneficial to anyone; it only perpetuates the current system of White dominance and ignores the needs of students of color (Gordon, 2005). Teaching in a culturally diverse school provides teachers the opportunity to confront their racial beliefs. Those who



wrestle with their beliefs about race have the opportunity to learn, but with some pain, conflict, and loss (Howard, 1999). Many teachers are unaware of their unconscious beliefs and attitudes towards students of color and how those beliefs influence their teaching. Delpit (2006) put it this way:

We all interpret behaviors, information, and situations through our own cultural lenses; these lenses operate involuntarily, below the level of conscious awareness, making it seem that our own view is simply “the way it is”. Learning to interpret across cultural demands reflecting on our own experiences, analyzing our own culture, examining and comparing varying perspectives. We must consciously and voluntarily make our cultural lenses apparent. Engaging in the hard work of seeing the world as others see it must be a fundamental goal for any move to reform the education of teachers and their assessments. (p. 151)

When working with students of color, the White educator needs to increase his or her own consciousness and assumptions about race in schools, as in one study, many of the White teachers “were unaware of the relative ‘privileged’ positioning that Whites already had in a Eurocentric, White Amerocentric school culture and curriculum” (Kailin, 1999, p. 735). One author said, “When those of us from the dominant culture do not recognize how our culture is embedded in our language, actions, and values, we implicitly and sometimes explicitly ask ‘those who have culture’ to check it at the door” (Rose-Cohen, 2004, p. 38). Milner (2003) also said:

Race reflection does not necessarily involve a final destination; rather, it concerns conscious, effortful thinking that invites teachers to continually and

persistently reflect on themselves as racial beings in order to better understand themselves in relation to others' racial identities, issues, and experiences and reject commonly held beliefs and stereotypes. (p. 176)

If these stereotypes are not addressed then, "Teachers may continue their work in the same manner without attempting to change their thinking and actions [and] they may blame the diverse students or even parents for their disparities and variations" (Milner, p. 176). Another author suggested, "Many Black and Hispanic youth are penalized for not knowing how to 'behave' in school or for exhibiting behavior that is too different from that of their White counterparts" (Kuykendall, 1991, p. 5).

A White educator's unawareness of his or her White identity can negatively affect his or her students of color (Oates, 2003; Tettegah, 1996). Some believe, "That the prejudiced thinking of some teachers and administrators may result in the self-fulfilling prophecy that Black [minority] students cannot perform as adequately as White students" (Sheehan & Marcus, 1977, p. 123), but that this conversation is occurring "in the mind of the teacher" and the teacher may, unconsciously grade a student's paper based on those preconceptions (Oates). According to Darling-Hammond (2010), "Many teachers hold particularly low expectations of African American and Latino students, treat them more harshly than other students, discourage their achievement, and punish them disproportionately" (p. 208). One author said, "Teacher attitudes have consequences; once teachers develop low expectations, and the accompanying negative behavior, they send signals that suggest the student is hopeless" (Kuykendall, 1991, p. 2). One study showed that students scored higher in math and reading if they had a

teacher of the same race, and this was especially true with students in poorer schools with inexperienced teachers (Dee, 2001), but, as stated earlier, most of our nation's teachers are White while there is a large number of students of color. That is why it is important for White educators to understand their own culture or White identity, "As a step toward personal transformation and moreover, as indispensable when addressing race-based inequity" (Raible & Irizarry, 2007, p. 188). As one author said, "Identifying my culture took practice" (Rose-Cohen, 2004, p. 37). She later continued saying, "The more I acknowledged my cultural belongings ... The more I could see the privilege aspects my culture afforded me" (Rose-Cohen, p. 37), and "When we acknowledge our culture, we make room for the realization that our teaching practices and learning environments are imbedded with our own cultural codes and traditions" (Rose-Cohen, p. 37), and, "Moments when knowing ourselves inspires a deeper knowing of others" (Rose-Cohen, p. 39).

As White educators begin to understand their own race and cultural identities we can then begin to understand the race and cultural identities of our students. This can prove challenging for us and one author suggested that, "The biggest challenge we face as educators is the challenge of stepping outside of our own cultural orientation so that we can develop a greater appreciation for and understanding of those who are different" (Kuykendall, 1991, p. 1). In one study of pre-service teachers and their work at an inner city school, one of the participants expressed her belief that nothing could have prepared her for her experience (Rushton, 2003). The cultural capital that racially diverse students bring to the classroom differs from the mainstream views (Howard, 2003);

teachers need to reach out and teach these students (Griffith & London, 1980) and abandon the “deficit-based” thinking they hold about culturally diverse students (Howard, 2003). “As White educators, we cannot fully know or experience the struggles of our students and colleagues of color, but we can work to create an empathetic environment in which their stories and experiences can be acknowledged and shared” (Howard, 1999, p. 75). Kuykendall (1991) said, “Teachers must show a respect for the student and his or her culture, life experiences, and unique learning style” (p. 51), and, “the appreciation of cultural diversity and the implementation of pluralistic curricula will benefit all students ... otherwise we perpetuate cultural and racial alienation and bigotry” (p. 113).

Is it possible to prepare teachers for this experience? Some believe that teacher training programs, in an effort to produce highly qualified teachers, must prepare a teacher to appreciate the cultural experiences that students bring to class and be ready to teach a diverse student population (Futrell, 2004). In one study a pre-service teacher felt frustrated about her lack of preparation to work in inner-city schools and said, “Pretty much all the inner-city interns that I have talked to feel that [the university] did not prepare us whatsoever about working in the inner-city schools” (Rushton, 2004, p. 73). Some researchers believe that, “We must incorporate into the teaching practice a pedagogy that sensitizes pre-service and in-service teachers to the racial constructions of reality in their own socializations and behavior” (Kailin, 1999, p. 747). In terms of teacher education, Delpit (2006) stated, “There is no doubt that issues of diversity form the crux of what may be one of the biggest challenges yet to face those of us whose

business it is to educate teachers” (p. 105). The demand for student achievement continues to increase, at the same time diversity increases in the classroom and this places pressure on our schools to meet the needs of all students. Darling-Hammond (2010) said:

Teachers need to know a lot more to teach today’s diverse students to more challenging learning standards than ever before—including how to teach much more ambitious disciplinary content and cross-disciplinary skills and how to teach special needs learners, English language learners, and others who require specialized forms of teaching. (p. 207)

We hope that research can “provide insights into how to better prepare those from the larger culture to teach the increasingly diverse student bodies they are likely to face in the course of their careers” (Delpit, p. 107), and Delpit (2006) believed that, “A reconceptualization of how we structure teacher education may provide the beginnings of a solution for all these issues” (p. 124). Teachers have great influence on their students and in the classroom. Because of this, a teacher training program needs to help White teachers become aware of their race and how it influences them as an educator (Marx & Pennington, 2003; Tettegah, 1996).

So what happens when these teachers enter the workforce unprepared to teach diverse student populations? “Tens of thousands of teachers are underprepared and undersupported, especially in schools serving low-income students of color” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 207). Some believe that experienced teachers need to be allowed

the time to work with new teachers for this purpose (Futrell, 2004); this could take the form of a mentoring program for new teachers. One author put it this way:

At most one can hope that teacher education programs begin to prepare prospective mainstream teachers to work with linguistically diverse populations that inhabit large urban areas. The quality of that preparation, realistically, is likely to be questionable for some time to come. Therefore mentoring programs become especially significant in terms of the recruitment and retention. (Torres-Guzman, 1996, p 53.)

Including mentoring as a part of teacher induction for teachers in urban schools helps novice teachers learn to address the experiences students from different racial and ethnic groups bring with them (Tillman, 2003). A mentor can help the novice to realize their own identities about race, ethnicity, and social class (Howard, 2003), and can help new teachers “develop strategies for working with diverse students” (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004, p. 329). Tillman (2005) said:

Teachers in urban schools usually serve poor children of color, they may suffer from low morale, resources are usually scarce, there may be an absence of parental involvement, and academic instruction may be administered differently. Given these factors (as well as others), the urban school culture may also pose different roles for teacher mentors than would be found in schools serving predominantly middle-class children. (p. 612)

Another group of authors put it this way: “Many young recruits in high-needs schools must work 12-hour days, every day (plus additional weekends and late nights) to get all

the work done and serve the needs of the children and their families” (Berry et al., 2011, p. 189); however, these teachers can improve “with more-effective leadership, better training, and quality peer assistance ... Effective teachers can be cultivated within high-needs schools, not just recruited to them” (p. 192). A mentor cannot only help the new teacher understand the culture of the students, but can also connect the new teacher with other staff members of color who might be able to provide assistance in understanding the cultural differences. One author said that White educators need to listen to their colleagues of color, be honest about the gaps in their own knowledge and to commit to learning more, while challenging students of color, and not pitying them (Mitchie, 2007). Delpit (2006) said, “I have found that if I want to learn how best to teach children who may be different from me, then I must seek the advice of adults – teachers and parents – who are from the same culture as my students” (p. 102).

Hopefully, through mentoring and the help of colleagues of color, new teachers can begin to relate to and understand their students better; and, eventually provide instruction that meets the needs of all of their students. Kuykendall (1991) believed that “an excited, understanding, and caring teacher can bond with a student, regardless of background, language, race, or culture” (p. 52), and that, “Family and cultural strengths can be acknowledged through class discussions or writing activities that allow students to relate family and personal experiences” (p. 54). To do this it is important for a teacher to build relationships with their students. Delpit (2006) reflected, “However I have learned from interviews and personal experiences with teachers from communities of color that many of these individuals believe teaching begins instead with the

establishment of relationships between themselves and their students” (p. 139), and that for one teacher she studied, “Rather than resorting to the power rooted in her role as a classroom teacher, she drew upon her sense of emotional affiliation with them” (p. 143). Delpit (2006) further stated that in order for a teacher to build a relationship with their students they need to “connect with the families and communities from which their students come” (p. 179). Teachers have great influence in the classroom and, “It makes sense that teachers who want to effect change would begin by trying to improve communication between themselves and their students” (Lawrence & Tatum, 1997, p. 167); and, “Perhaps one small step that educators can take in pointing out pathways to achievement is to reach out to their students; teach them and lead them” (Griffith & London, 1980, p. 146).

### **Role of Mentoring**

Novice teachers enter the field of education with a variety of experiences and the nurturing of novice teachers is essential for teacher induction – this can be achieved with mentoring. As a mentor creates a caring atmosphere with the novice, the novice in turn will create a caring atmosphere in his/her own classroom (Blair-Larson & Bercik, 1992). One novice teacher felt that her university training did not prepare her for coping with the issues in an inner-city school – one might deduce that having a caring and nurturing mentor might provide more foundation for this teacher (Rushton, 2004). Rushton (2004) continued with saying, “Fieldwork can lead to a miserable experience and leave a sense of abject failure ... there is much room for improvement ... mentoring teachers might learn from this experience to remind themselves of just how much influence they



have on young aspiring teachers” (p. 77). New teachers need a buddy they can talk to, but they also need the professional support, “Mentors can be a professional lifeline for their new colleagues” (Halford, 1998, p. 35). Mentoring new teachers only enhances the preparation a teacher receives from their pre-service training (Darling-Hammond, 2003). No matter how excellent a teacher training program is, it cannot adequately prepare new teachers for all of the challenges and realities of teaching, “Support and assistance must continue throughout the first year and become a part of an ongoing program of professional development” (Johnson, 2001, p. 48). We need mentors because “no one should have to begin teaching alone and in isolation” (Eick, 2002, p. 903) and, “The school has enormous responsibility in making the teacher feel welcome within a supportive environment” (Farrell, 2003, p. 109). One author referred to education as, “The profession that eats its young” (Halford, 1998, p. 33). According to M. C. Clement (as cited in Johnson, 2001, p. 47), “Teaching is a very challenging job, and unlike people in other professions, new teachers are not given the luxury of easing into their jobs.” Johnson (2001) continued later with, “Considering the ‘sink or swim’ approach used in many schools, the fact that many teachers remain past their first few years is a tribute to their tenacity and strong desire to teach” (p. 48). The early days of the school year, a new teacher’s immediate goal is survival and mentors provide support during this time (Trubowitz, 2004). Even veteran teachers acknowledge a need for mentors. A group of teachers in Georgia, when asked about new teachers, said that new teachers should be mentored by veteran teachers (Division for Educator Workforce Research and Development Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2001). Also, new teachers

want the support from others; one new teacher stated it this way: “New teachers need a lot of affirmation and support to pull through the first year” (Farrell, 2003, p. 107).

New teachers often are placed in classrooms alone, with the assumption that they should instinctively know what to do, with very little support, but according to one researcher, “Effective teaching is not intuitive ... they [new teachers] share the need for support and belonging ... [and] new teachers cannot be left to figure things out in a vacuum” (Watkins, 2005, p. 83). Darling-Hammond (2010) said, “Although people ... do learn from their experience [in teaching], they do not always learn the right things” (p. 208), and she went on to say that they “need the opportunity to work with skillful and committed colleagues, and to be in environments where they can be efficacious” (p. 208). The journey of the relationship between the mentor and the new teacher begins with the mentor working to “make suggestions, provide resources, and offer direct guidance” (Trubowitz, 2004, p. 61), eventually the mentor and the mentee collaborate more and finally they reach a point where the mentor may even learn from the mentee, as true colleagues (Trubowitz), but this all comes from months of support.

If new teachers are not supported adequately, it is the students and their academic achievement that suffer; and, “The greatest benefits of supporting new teachers can be found in the classroom” (Halford, 1998, p. 36). Mentors can help new teachers on a variety of problems, some of them very simple and some of them more complex (Johnson, 2001). One group of new teachers shared in one study, “Their mentors helped them to improve their teaching ... [and] they learned the craft of teaching through their work with the experienced teacher” (Thompson & Smith, 2004, p. 78).

New teachers need “to observe and consult with other experienced teachers” who have experience with different teaching methods (Eick, 2002, p. 902). These new teachers come into the profession less skilled than their veteran counterparts, yet they are given the same level of responsibilities (Farrell, 2003). As new teachers carry the weight of figuring out the ins and outs of the profession they tend to focus on themselves and their individual needs and ignore the needs of their students. “New teacher mentoring can challenge teachers more quickly to move past self and procedures to focus on learners” (Athanases & Achinstein, 2003, p. 1487). If a teacher is preoccupied with their own issues they cannot adequately focus on the needs of their students (Reiman & Peace, 2002). “Intervention is possible and potentially effective in interrupting predictable development and in focusing the new teacher’s attention early in a career on individual student learning” (Athanases & Achinstein, p. 1517). “Meaningful interactions about professional practices apparently lead to increased trust within the relationship and stimulate both mentors and mentees to critically examine their work and to improve their teaching” (Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998, p. 312). As teachers improve their instructional skills they grow as a professional and this growth in professionalism is very important to improve the educational outcomes for students (Cheng, 1996).

A mentor can help new teachers with the everyday things of teaching such as where the copy machine is or school procedures, but this is not enough; they come, “Without an adequate repertoire of teaching materials” (Halford, p. 33). The mentor needs, “A broad repertoire of instructional strategies they can tap to guide new teachers”

(Athanases & Achinstein, 2003, p. 1498). The mentor can be beneficial with improving the new teacher's instructional practices and their development as a professional. "The mentor and mentee engage in lesson planning conversations, discuss observed teaching, participate in post-observation reflecting conferences, discuss model lessons, share resources, and set goals together" (Athanases & Achinstein, p. 1493). Sometimes the situation calls for "explicit coaching" from the mentor as they model lessons because this relationship needs to be more than just a "buddy" type relationship if real impact is going to be made on student achievement (Athanases & Achinstein).

The mentoring should be "grounded in knowledge of student and adult learners, of pedagogy, and of assessment, and that skillful use of that knowledge can bring individual student learning into focus and provide new teachers with instantiation of methods for shaping instruction to meet students' varied learning needs" (Athanases & Achinstein, 2003, p. 1516). Darling-Hammond (2010) said, "Teaching cannot be learned from books or even from being mentored periodically. Teachers must see expert practices modeled and must practice them with help" (p. 214).

The role of mentor needs to be non-evaluative for full effectiveness. In one study of two novice middle school teachers discussed how their assistant principal served as their mentor as well as their evaluator, "His role as mentor would be in conflict with his role as their formal evaluator ... Beginning teachers need non-evaluative support through ongoing dialogue with a respected and trusted colleague" (Eick, 2002, pp. 901-902). New teachers need feedback without feeling worried about negative implications (Farrell, 2003). A new teacher needs to feel comfortable asking questions and seeking

help without being viewed negatively. Sometimes new teachers hesitate to seek help because they recognize that they have significantly less experience than their peers (Eick) and they feel “concerned that seeking assistance for [their] classroom problems would be viewed as a sign of incompetence” (Halford, 1998, p. 33). Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) put it this way:

The mentoring relationship is special because of its entrusting nature. Those being mentored are dependent upon their mentors to help them, protect them, show them the way, and develop more fully their skills and insights. ... They want to know what they are supposed to do. ... They want, in other words, to be tutored by an individual they trust without worrying too much about having to make an impression. (pp. 255-256)

As a part of the non-evaluative nature of the relationship, “The role of the mentor is to be confidential support providers” (Halford, p. 35). When the mentor allows and encourages the mentee to speak freely then this “allows a relationship of trust and understanding to develop” (Trubowitz, 2004, p. 60). In one study the mentees said they enjoyed having the “opportunity to vent their frustrations within a supportive atmosphere” because their mentors “were not judging the new teachers, [they] were not a threat” (Blair-Larson & Bercik, 1992, p. 28). Trust develops between the mentor and the new teacher when the mentor asks questions in a “non-judgmental” way, listens, and provides “non-evaluative feedback” (Strong & Baron, 2004, p. 53).

Those who serve as mentors should be veteran teachers who have proved to be of quality who can share techniques and give advice based on their experience (Eick,

2002). “New teachers need mentoring by veteran teachers who teach the same subject at the same grade level and who are located nearby to facilitate quick and easy answers to questions” (Division for Educator Workforce Research, 2001, p. 16). As one author put it, “This allows for a productive mentor-new teacher relationship that is most likely to develop when two teachers instruct in similar content and similar age groups and are located in the same area of the building” (Zimpher & Rieger, 1988, p. 180).

Mentoring involves a healthy relationship between the mentor and the mentee. It is important that those chosen to mentor are not only highly skilled veterans, but they also should “possess good interpersonal skills” (Kajs et al., 2001, p. 3), and the mentor’s personal and professional skills will be “vitally important to the success” of the mentoring relationship (Rippon & Martin, 2003, p. 222). A mentor’s ability to use interpersonal skills strengthens the relationship between the mentor and the new teacher. There needs to be “free and honest” communication between the mentor and the mentee as the relationship builds (Trubowitz, 2004, p. 61). In one study the new teachers, “Hoped that the relationship [between them and the mentor] would progress towards one based on ‘friendship’ and ‘being equal members of staff,’ regardless of lack of experience” (Rippon & Martin, p. 216). The authors of this study went on to say, “The induction process has to become person-centered,” and “the induction process has to be guided by a recognition that the probationer teachers are people” (Rippon & Martin, p. 221).

The mentor is often one of the first people that a novice teacher interacts with at the school. Mentoring teachers have an influential role in the development of novice

teachers (Rushton, 2003). It is essential that this relationship is positive for the novice teacher. In one study of pre-service teachers in urban schools, the majority of the participants described their relationship with their mentor as positive and viewed working with their mentors as very important to their development (Thompson & Smith, 2004). A mentor functions to transmit formal knowledge of skills, to teach the rules, values, and ethics of education, and should seek to encourage and praise the novice teacher to build their confidence (Cross, 1995). The quality of the mentor and novice teacher relationship is very important in the induction process (Rippin & Martin). One study showed for one new teacher that, “As her relationship with her mentoring teacher grew, her personal beliefs and efficacy also developed” (Rushton, p. 183). Another author said, “Commitment and respect for human dignity must undergird one’s service in the mentoring role; entrusting one’s development to another means that the role must be taken seriously” (Zimpher & Rieger, 1988, p. 181).

The amount of time a mentor spends with a new teacher is critical and as one author put it, “Not allowing adequate time can doom a program. You can’t do this on the fly,” (Halford, 1998, p. 36). A new teacher needs ample, structured time with her mentor so they can have time to reflect on their own teaching (Eick, 2002). As they spend time with veteran teachers, novices reflect on their own teaching as they move towards becoming highly qualified teachers. To do this time needs to be given to these veteran teachers to mentor the new teachers “as they strengthen their teaching skills” (Futrell, 2004, p. 111). If the veteran teacher is given additional time to spend with the new teacher they can more easily assist the new teacher to become a part of the school

culture (Farrell, 2003). Often the work a mentor does is done after school, in addition to the other duties the mentor teacher has, mentor teachers “need opportunities for release time” (Zimpher & Rieger, 1988, p. 179). It is important for mentors to “make time to spend with the probationer teachers to support, guide and discuss issues with them as they arise” (Rippon & Martin, 2003, p. 224). “Mentors need to know things about particular students in a new teacher’s class rather than being merely a drop-in visitor to a class unknown to him or her” (Athanases & Achinstein, 2003, p. 1497). One new teacher was upset that his mentor did not have the same planning period as him and, “If he wanted to meet with her [mentor] to ask questions, reflect on the day, or just vent, he had to schedule time before or after school” (Renard, 2003, p. 2). Reinard (2003) suggested, “Make certain that new teachers and their mentors have the same planning period, and occasionally provide substitute teachers so that novices can either meet with their mentors for extended periods or observe the mentors’ classroom” (p. 3).

Some school systems address the issue of time by using different layers of support, “In other words, some teachers have been largely removed from classroom responsibilities to deal with instructional matters and professional growth matters” (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998, p. 321). These veteran teachers work fulltime as mentors to new teachers, where the mentor works with several teachers, sometimes as many as 15 (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004), often at different campuses, and spends time weekly with each mentee, but also keeps in contact via email, text messaging, or over the phone (Johnson, 2001). This is sometimes referred to as a “full release” mentoring program (Hanson & Moir, 2008, p. 453) and sometimes these mentors are referred to as “teacher



coaches” and are expected to spend as much as 96 hours a year with a first year teacher (Sterling & Frazier, 2011).

The idea behind this type of mentoring program focuses on the mentor being available to be in the teacher’s classroom during instruction to provide insight into a new teacher’s instructional practices, thus having a direct impact on the quality of the new teacher’s instruction (Sterling & Frazier, 2011). One author put it this way, “Here a more formalized and systematic pairing of mentor to inductee may be necessary in order to assure that beginning teachers or new arrivals to school districts have some instructional assistance” (Zimpher & Rieger, 1988, p. 181).

One such district that employed this type of mentoring program listed the goal of this new teacher program as:

- To develop teacher capacity as defined in the California Standards for the Teaching Profession;
- To direct support toward improving student achievement;
- To use formative assessment practices to guide support;
- To document growth over time;
- To model and encourage ongoing self-assessment and reflection;
- To foster collaboration and leadership among teachers. (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004, p. 324-325)

The hope is that these goals can be met when the new teacher and the mentor meet weekly for one to two hours (Fletcher & Barrett).

If this type of program is to work then a healthy relationship must exist between the mentor and the principal, and the mentor must familiarize themselves with the school's culture to help the new teacher smoothly become a part of this culture (Trubowitz, 2004). The principal and the outside mentor need to work together to create an environment of support, and the mentor should meet on regular basis with the principal to ensure that the mentoring process is "aligned with school goals" (Moir, 2009, p. 17).

One researcher found that this type of mentoring was not enough for the new teacher. He suggested supplementing this system with a more informal layer of support where each teacher is assigned a "buddy" at the mentee's campus because this type of model lacks support at the campus level (Farrell, 2003). In one study the new teachers were given multiple layers of support including a teaching mentor who was a fellow teacher on campus and a teaching coach who came once a week and provided instructional support by observing and modeling lessons. This study, done over two years, showed that the new teachers felt the assistance from the teaching coach was the most valuable, but they benefitted from all the layers of support (Sterling & Frazier, 2011). The study found that the benefits to the new teacher to having a fellow classroom teacher varied from campus to campus, and depended on the school culture – whether it was an environment of support and teamwork or more of a "sink or swim" environment, and the new teachers who received the most support from a campus mentor, their students scored higher than students whose teachers had less support (Sterling & Frazier). One reason to continue to include a teaching mentor who is a fellow teacher, in

addition to a teacher coach or an outside mentor, matches much of the research, that shows the benefits to new teachers having a mentor who teaches the same subject, at the same grade level, and in the same school and in close proximity to the new teacher (Abu Rass, 2010; Division for Educator Workforce Research, 2001; Renard, 2003; Tillman, 2005; Zimpher & Rieger, 1988;).

### **Campus Enculturation**

A relationship with a fellow teacher is important because this mentor is the liaison between the mentee and the rest of the staff (Cross, 1995). Mentoring assists novice teachers as they adapt to school culture and in their interactions with other teachers and administrators (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004). Mentors needs to provide opportunities for the novice teacher to interact with other staff members and help socialize the novice teacher to the school culture and operate as a “colleague among other staff” (Rippon & Martin, 2003, p.222), because, “The mentor is presumed to know more not only about matters if teaching but also about the school’s culture so that the novice can navigate through this culture successfully” (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998, p. 256). As the novice teacher “comes to terms” with the school culture he/she begins to become a part of the school (Tillman, 2003). The mentor aids this by encouraging other staff members to be supportive and welcoming to the novice (Cross, 1995). The bridging of this relationship is important because teachers often work in isolation, but for the demands on education in current times, collaboration is a must because, “Teachers learn most from each other ... peer learning among small groups of experienced and qualified teachers seemed to be the most powerful predictor of student achievement over

time” (Berry et al., 2011, p. 71). Studies show, “Teachers are expected to support each other but generally do not collaborate on instruction and only rarely observe each other’s class ...mentor-based induction may help new teachers learn how to discuss instruction with colleagues, as well as how to interact with administrators” (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004, p. 331). Sometimes new teachers feel like asking for help from fellow colleagues may make them look incompetent or because they may not trust others, that is why they need a mentor to bridge this relationship so that the new teacher can become a full member of the instruction staff and the school (Eick, 2002; Halford, 1998). One new teacher said, “I didn’t talk much with the other teachers because they were always busy and into cliques” (Farrell, 2003, p. 103). For this new teacher, “A properly trained mentor could have provided a more sheltered experience during his first semester/year and he could have acted as a bridge between the new and the more established teachers at the school” (Farrell, p. 104). “New teachers need support networks ... comprised of fellow teachers and administrators ... mentoring,” is a component of this support system (Anhorn, 2008, p. 19) and a new teacher, “Must have opportunities to connect with like-minded colleagues; these relationships will sustain the teacher well beyond the first year” (Watkins, 2005, p. 85).

It is the whole school’s job to help a new teacher feel a part of the campus and a part of the profession, and the mentor is the person to provide that link (Cross, 1995). When teachers have a sense of “teamwork” it increases teacher moral and creates, “A school climate that is conducive to teaching and learning,” (Division for Educator Workforce Research and Development Georgia Professional Standards Commission,

2001, p. 14). The generation of new teachers entering the workforce today are considered “millenials”, although there is not much research yet on this generation of teachers, some are finding that this new generation of teachers strongly desire to develop friendships with their colleagues and that working as a team with fellow grade-level or subject-area teachers is very attractive to them (Richardson, 2011). The mentor’s guidance is key to a novice teacher’s development of interpersonal relations with students, administrators, staff, and parents (Tillman, 2003), and, “Their influence on the socialization of the probationer teacher into the school culture and their place on the hierarchical ladder has to be acknowledged” (Rippon & Martin, p. 222). Teachers find social satisfaction when they are satisfied in their relationships with colleagues (Cheng, 1994). Novice teachers need to view themselves as members of the school (Tillman). Their clothing and activities should adapt to fit the culture (Roshton, 2003).

Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) put it this way:

Given what is known about the importance of the school’s inside culture, the informal norm system that exists among teachers, and the potential that exists for teachers to share talents, mentoring makes sense as a natural way to orient new teachers, give them a successful start, and invite them to become full colleagues. (p. 256)

At a culturally diverse campus this may be more difficult for a novice teacher because they may not relate to their students on a cultural level and it takes time for a teacher to adjust to the diverse backgrounds of the students, their families, and the school culture (Tillman). A mentor assists the new teacher with their enculturation with their students

as the mentor helps the novice develop strategies for working with diverse students (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004). When the novice teacher's relationships with students, teachers, and parents become familiar a novice begins to better understand the culture of a school (Roshton, 2003). As a novice teacher works with their mentor, interacts with the administration and other staff members they begin to join into campus life, but if they fail to do this they may be likely to leave (Fletcher & Barrett).

### **Teacher Retention**

As one pre-service teacher worked with inner-city schools, struggling with her enculturation into the campus life, she began to wonder if she made the right decision pursuing a teaching career (Roshton, 2003). Novice educators need to hear from their mentor, principal, and other faculty that they are valued and needed (Johnson, 2001). When considering the cost of a mentoring program – time, money, energy, – the value is priceless if it helps keep good teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Schools with high numbers of students of color tend to have lower retention rates (Shen, 1998). With any school setting, including urban areas, good teachers stay at schools where they believe they are appreciated and supported (Darling-Hammond). Concerns of novice teachers need to be addressed because schools cannot afford to lose good teachers (Johnson), especially schools with high numbers of students of color. Teacher attrition disrupts the learning process and weakens the bond between teachers and students – especially students at inner-city schools (Shen). When asked, a group of university students, at graduation, said they had high expectations for their relationships with their future colleagues – they were deflated when they perceived that their administrators did not

seem to care or support them - if novice teachers continue to feel this way they will leave (Johnson). “Too many good teachers are leaving before they have had a chance at much of a beginning” (Johnson, p 45).

### **Chapter Conclusion**

Schools today are growing more and more diverse, while the nation’s teaching force is still comprised primarily of White teachers. This means that many classrooms are filled with students from many different racial and ethnic groups while most of the teachers standing in front of them are White. This can create a dissonance between the teacher and her students as the teacher works to understand his or her own race identity and bridge the gap between him or herself and the students. This is difficult for many White educators as they are unaware of their White privilege and the advantages that it affords them.

Mentoring is important for any teacher as they enter the profession and can prove even more important for those teaching at culturally diverse campuses. A new teacher faces many challenges as he or she is inducted into the profession. Relationships with administrators, other staff members and teachers, relationships with students and their parents, each of these can prove trying and stressful, especially if the new teacher comes from a cultural background different from his or her students. On top of that, each new teacher must also figure out how to do the day-to-day duties of teaching. It is important for schools to help new teachers as they make this transition into the profession, into campus life, and into the lives of their students. Our schools cannot afford for good teachers to leave.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **METHODS**

As the student population in our nation's schools grows more diverse culturally, and as the teaching force remains largely White, it is important to understand how these cultural differences affect teachers and their perceptions of their students, and how these perceptions affect their instruction, and their overall feelings about their jobs. This is especially true with novice teachers. This chapter describes the design of this study and the approach taken to understanding how mentoring affects the perceptions of a White female novice teacher's enculturation into campus life at a culturally diverse school.

As a White teacher who taught students of color, I at times experienced frustrations in regards to connecting with and understanding my students of color. There were many cultural differences that I did not see, nor understand, that hindered my instructional practices and my ability to connect with some of my students. This greatly bothered me, because I genuinely cared for my students and only wanted the best for them, yet I know that at times I could not bridge the cultural gap, while other times I remained largely unaware of the existence of this cultural gap. I have learned during my years that much of the dissonance rested with the cultural differences separating me from my students and that these were things that I could not see at first, and to which I was relatively naïve.

I know that I was not and am not alone. Many White teachers remain unaware of the cultural differences that exist between them and their students of color, and of the



privileges they experience as members of the dominant culture. My hope in this study is to provide some understanding of how a White novice teacher perceives her enculturation into campus life at a culturally diverse school and how mentoring helps in this process. The perspective gained through this study might provide insight into how to provide effective and quality mentoring to a White novice teacher, as she becomes a part of campus life at a culturally diverse school.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Today as the student populations in our schools grow more racially and ethnically diverse, while our teaching population remains largely White, for the benefit of both students and teachers it is important that we, as a profession, work to help new teachers fully enculturate into the profession. This involves not only preparing them to work as professionals but to assist them in understanding their students, their cultural backgrounds, and how this impacts instruction and learning. This can be done through effective mentoring, and that is why there is a need for more research on how mentoring affects the perceptions White female novice teachers have of their enculturation into culturally diverse campuses. The analysis and discussion on the matter can further our understanding of how mentoring affects the perceptions a new White female teacher has of her enculturation into her culturally diverse campus, so that we can improve on these activities, easing the enculturation of these teachers, and ultimately improving their instructional practices and the learning outcomes of all students.

**Purpose**

Mentoring may help White novice teachers better enculturate into campus life at schools whose populations consist of a significant number of students of color; furthermore, by helping White novice teachers enculturate into their campuses, it may help these teachers increase their positive perceptions of their interactions with students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and their success as teachers. So then, the purpose of this study is to see the role mentoring plays in a White female teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into campus life at a culturally diverse campus, during her first year of teaching.

**Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following questions in regards to how to address the purpose of understanding how a new White teacher perceives her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus.

1. What are a White female novice teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into campus life within her first year of teaching?
2. How does a White female novice teacher perceive her interactions with her students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and how does she interpret these interactions in relationship to her perception of her enculturation into campus life?
3. What role does the White female novice teacher perceive that mentoring plays in her perceptions of her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus?

## **Methods**

### **Research paradigm**

To answer these questions and to grasp a fuller understanding of this particular phenomenon, I chose to do a qualitative study because I wanted to understand a White female novice teacher's perception of her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus "with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (Merriam, 1998, p. 5), because "meaning is embedded in people's experiences" (p. 6). I conducted this qualitative research through a case study because, as Merriam (1998) said, "A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. ... Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research" (p.19). I focused on this single phenomenon, a single unit, in hopes to provide an in-depth description of the phenomenon of a White female novice teacher at a culturally diverse campus to provide better insight and understanding involved in this phenomenon, as is the nature of a case study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998; Merriam, 2002). As with other types of studies done in this manner, I observed, interviewed, dialogued, and reflected, to make this phenomenon a part of myself and then tell this story of this White female novice teacher teaching at a culturally diverse campus (Josselson, 1995).

I chose to work from an interpretivism paradigm because I was interested in finding meaning and understanding in how this White female teacher made sense of and interpreted her experience as a first year teacher at a culturally diverse campus; and an interpretivism paradigm allows for that (Merriam, 1994). I did this by immersing myself

into the context during my observations, and engaging in a dialogue with this first year teacher through interviews and emails, as interpretive studies involve engaging in this type of dialogue to understand the phenomenon (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997). I served as the primary instrument for data collection as I interviewed, email dialogued, and observed my subject, methods often used in this type of study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam 1994).

### **Site and participant selection**

As this was a qualitative study from an interpretivism paradigm, this influenced the site and participant selection process. As Merriam (1998) suggests for qualitative research, the participant selection was “nonrandom, purposeful, and small” (p. 8). The participant was chosen because she was a White female first year teacher teaching at a culturally diverse campus, and she had a mentor. To find this participant, I contacted the superintendent of a school district that had a student population largely comprised of students of color, in this case Hispanic, and a district that also provided mentors for their first year teachers. The campus chosen was a fifth grade center located in a suburban school, outside of a large metropolitan area in Texas. The student population of the campus was close to 85 percent Hispanic, with many of those students being economically disadvantaged. The teacher had a mentor teacher, who came to her campus once a week.

### **Data collection**

To fully understand and grasp meaning from this White female novice teacher’s experience at this campus, I used several methods for data collection. I, the researcher,

served as the primary instrument for data collection and sought to acquire the data in ways that included the participant's words, through semi-structured interviews, and email dialogues, as well as field notes generated from my observations to gain in-depth understanding, which are methods used when conducting this type of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998). Also, it is important to understand my personal biases, as I served as the primary instrument for data collection. As some suggest, as the primary instrument for data collection my personal biases influence my perceptions and interpretations (Merriam). As a new teacher myself, I received mentoring from experienced teachers my first two years of teaching. I also served as a mentor to two novice teachers during two of my teaching years, and I worked as a teacher mentor at a charter school in Texas, mentoring several new teachers over the course of one school year. My experiences with these situations influenced my perceptions of the phenomenon studied here.

As stated earlier, the subject studied in this research was chosen because she was a White female novice teacher teaching at a campus whose population had a majority of students of color. The campus studied in this research was chosen because it was located in a suburb of a large metropolitan area, with a majority of students being students of color. To find this subject, I contacted a superintendent of a large suburban school district outside of a large metropolitan area in Texas. According to the 2009-2010 TEA (Texas Education Agency, 2010) report, this district's student population was 15 percent White, and the largest student group being Hispanic with 63 percent. The percentage of White teachers for the same year was about 65 percent (TEA, 2010). The

superintendent put me in contact with the principal of a fifth grade center through e-mail. The principal asked several of her teachers, fitting the description, if they were willing. She gave me the name of one teacher willing to participate. From this point forward the communication was only between the teacher and me. The teacher agreed to participate in the study, unofficially, after having read the description of the study and what would be required of her throughout the study. The teacher and I corresponded by e-mail until a face-to-face meeting was arranged, several weeks later. We met at a coffee shop, of the teacher's choosing, near the teacher's campus, where she officially agreed to participate and our journey began.

The campus was a fifth-grade center with a student population with approximately 85 percent Hispanic and 91 percent free or reduced lunch. This was the first year this campus served as a fifth grade center, in previous years it functioned as a K-5 elementary school. The principal, a White female, remained the same, but many of the teachers had changed. The teacher in this study was White, from a neighboring suburb, where she grew up and attended public school. She attended a private Christian university in the area. She student taught at this campus the previous spring semester with two cooperating teachers, one a first grade teacher and the other a third grade teacher, who no longer worked at this campus. This teacher was hired two days before the teachers reported back to work in August. The teacher had a mentor teacher, an African American woman, assigned to her from the district, who visited the teacher once a week and who mentored several other teachers on the campus. This mentor was not

housed at the teacher's campus. She mentored about 50 teachers at 9 different campuses across the district.

In this case study I used interviewing and observing, which, are modes of data collection, suggested for case studies by Sharan Merriam in *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (1998). The study took place over the course of several months during the teacher's first school year. I conducted 9 semi-structured interviews with the novice teacher, over several months, each lasting one to two hours. For 7 of these interviews we met at a coffee shop, of the teacher's choosing, near her campus. The other two were conducted at her campus, after school. I began with a list of questions for the initial interview and the questions for future interviews were developed during the course of the study based on the previous interviews, e-mails, and observations, and on some of the literature reviewed during the course of the study. These interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

I also shadowed the teacher for a full school day (seven hours) three times during the months of February, March and April, which produced field notes. I followed the teacher throughout her school day, going wherever she went, whether it to be an assembly, a student presentation in the library, recess, or lunch in the teacher's lounge. I had several casual conversations with the novice teacher and her fellow coworkers. While in her classroom, I sat as a quiet observer on the side of her classroom observing how she interacted with her students and with the other staff who came and went throughout the day. Our interviews for these months were held the same day as the shadowing, after school, on the teacher's campus.

In addition to shadowing the teacher and interviewing her, we communicated regularly through an email journal dialogue. The subject was given several prompts for these e-mails, but sometimes she just shared her current concerns. The prompts she responded to were:

- When I reflect on my interactions with my students I feel ...
- When I meet with my mentor I feel ...
- When I interact with other faculty and staff I think ...
- When I think about my teaching overall, I feel ...

Much of the information in these e-mails was used to construct the questions for the next interview between us.

I also conducted two additional semi-structured interviews with the teacher's mentor and principal, one interview each as a part of my triangulation. Each interview lasted about an hour. These were conducted near the end of the study and the questions generated for these interviews were based on questions or additional clarifications needed after the interviews, observations, and e-mails from the subject. I met with mentor on the novice teacher's campus in the afternoon. She chose the location, as she was already there for a meeting. The principal and I met at a coffee shop, of her choosing, near the campus. These interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

Throughout the study, I, as the researcher, kept a private journal (not shared with the novice teacher) of my experiences and thoughts about the study, I based my journal on what I discovered during my interactions with the novice teacher and with my



reviews of the current literature on the subjects of mentoring and teaching at culturally diverse campuses.

### **Data analysis**

To analyze the data obtained through these multiple methods of data collection, described above, I conducted the analysis process throughout the course of the study using the constant comparative method by Glaser and Strauss as cited in *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (Merriam, 1998, p. 159).

Throughout the process I constantly compared the data from each interview, email, and observation with the data from previous interviews, emails, and observations; the analysis of each data collection, informed the following interviews, emails, and observations (Merriam). Following each contact experience, I discovered new issues that needed to be addressed in future interviews or in the email dialogue, conducted between the novice teacher and myself. After each interview, I sifted through the data looking for emerging categories. I sought clarification from the interviewee at our next interview on any items that were unclear to me or that needed more attention and I formulated questions for our future interviews based on our previous interviews and email dialogues. After several interviews some common categories and themes began to surface. These often directed our conversations in future interviews. I clarified my findings with the novice teacher during our next interview and asked for further updates on the situations discussed in the earlier interviews.

After each day of shadowing, I went through the field notes of my observations to continue looking for emerging categories; I combined this data with the data from our

interviews and e-mails. As we dialogued regularly through e-mail journals, I highlighted the journals, coding the data to look for categories - and compared these to the categories generated from the interviews and the shadowing (Merriam, 1998; Wolcott, 1994).

As I read through the different sources of data and the emerging categories, I searched for emerging themes. I then began to group the data into these themes. As I analyzed the information produced from our contacts I compared that to the thoughts in my private journal and to some of the literature I had been reviewing. As more questions occurred, I clarified with the novice teacher. Some questions that began to arise included: Is the new teacher receiving the help and support she desires from her mentor? How is she feeling about her relationship with her students and their parents? How does the new teacher feel about her relationship with her administrators? How does the new teacher feel about her relationship with fellow staff members? How does the new teacher feel about her teaching overall? These recurring questions led to the development of the themes involving her relationship with her mentor, her relationship with her fellow staff members, including her principal, reading strategist, her team, and her team teacher, her relationship with her students and their parents, and her perceptions of herself as a career teacher. After the data was categorized and divided up into these themes, I began to tell the story of this White female novice teacher, building my case through, rich, thick description of the experience to ground my conclusions on the observed (Wolcott, 1994).

### **Trustworthiness**

It is important that this story is told in a trustworthy manner. To ensure trustworthiness – the validity and reliability of this study I implored several strategies, as described by Merriam (1998, 2002) in *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* and *Qualitative Research in Practice*. I had prolonged engagement as I studied the teacher over the course of a school year. I conducted member checks by clarifying the data with the participant after my analysis and reflection of each interview, email, and observation. By using multiple methods of data collection: interviews, email dialogues, field notes from observations, and researcher's journal, I triangulated the data. In terms of typicality, often new teachers receive mentoring from veteran teachers, and it is not uncommon for a White teacher to teach students of color, at culturally diverse campuses. For peer examination, at least two educational researchers read and examined this study and its completed presentation.

### **Significance**

This study is important because as the number of students of color rises in the nation, more White educators face the challenge of teaching and interacting with students who come from cultural backgrounds differing from their own. The conclusions of this study may assist mentors in helping White novice educators in learning to work with students of color. The study may also assist White novice educators with their awareness of how their cultural backgrounds affect their teaching and their interactions with students. If White educators struggle with teaching students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds they may be tempted to leave the profession. As they grow in their

awareness of their cultural biases, they may - in turn - grow in their interactions with students of color; thus, improving their teaching and consequently the education of their students. Also, as cited earlier, “Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research,” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). The conclusions of this study may help district and campus administrators in the organization of an effective mentoring program based on the needs and desires of a new teacher.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

Schools today grow more diverse as the student population increases with the number of students of color, while the teaching force remains largely White. Schools with diverse student populations often struggle to retain teachers as many new teachers are not prepared to work on campuses with large numbers of diverse students. These teachers remain largely unaware of how the cultural differences existing between them and their students greatly impacts instruction and their interactions with their students. This study addresses how a White female novice teacher perceives her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus while examining her perceptions of her relationships with the other staff, her mentor, the students and their parents. In this study I hope to provide insight into the importance of mentoring new teachers and their enculturation into the profession and campus life, especially those who teach at culturally diverse campuses.

Conducting a qualitative study from an interpretivism perspective, using a case study method, allowed the phenomenon of a White female novice teacher’s perceptions of her enculturation to be observed, understood, and interpreted with as little disruption to the natural setting, allowing the words of this teacher to speak. Through multiple

sources of data collection and the constant comparative method, the data collection and analysis provided room for the voice of this teacher to be heard and shared for the purpose of understanding this phenomenon, to hopefully improve the mentoring of new teachers at culturally diverse campuses, and the instruction delivered and received.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to determine the role mentoring played in a White female novice teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus. Kate was a first year teacher at a campus located in a suburb of a large metropolitan area in Texas. I feel, at the beginning, it is important to understand Kate as a whole person and how this influenced her as a teacher, coworker, and employee. Within the first few minutes of our first meeting Kate told me that God was the most important thing in her life. Her relationship with God was a constant part of our conversation and it will be sprinkled throughout the data. Her faith influenced her interactions with her students, their parents, and her fellow coworkers. It also influenced in whom she chose to confide and turn to for support, both professionally and emotionally. She told me that she became a teacher because she felt that God had called her to it and she viewed her interactions with others at her campus as a part of her ministry.

In the following pages, I will present my interpretation of Kate's perceptions of her enculturation into this culturally diverse campus by discussing the following topics: the context of Kate's school, the structure of the mentoring program, Kate's perceptions of her relationship with her mentor, Kate's relationships with her fellow staff members (including her team, the reading strategist and her administrators), Kate's perceptions of her relationship with her students and their parents, and how Kate feels about herself as a

teacher and her induction into the profession. Her story unfolds as each topic is discussed and the understanding and appreciation of how mentoring affects her perceptions of her enculturation comes to light. The main voice heard is Kate's, but discussions with her principal and mentor add to the conversation and provide a fuller picture of the school and Kate's experiences throughout her first year. To fully understand Kate's story it is important to first understand the school context, the district's mentoring program and Kate's relationship with her mentor. Then, it is necessary to discuss and understand Kate's perceptions of her relationships with her fellow staff members, her students and their parents. Finally, the discussion ends with a look at how Kate perceived herself as a teacher and her place in this profession.

### **School Context**

To understand how Kate perceived her enculturation into this campus and the role mentoring played in this enculturation, it is important to fully understand the context of her school. Kate taught fifth grade at the campus where she student taught the prior spring semester. The year she student taught, the school serviced elementary children grades kindergarten through fifth grade; and, Kate spent half of her student teaching in a third grade classroom and the other half in a first grade classroom. This year the campus changed and now functioned as a fifth grade center, receiving students from five different elementary schools. About half of the staff remained the same as the year prior, including the principal. Many of the teachers were new to the campus and new to teaching fifth grade as well, although many were experienced teachers. The two teachers that Kate did her student teaching with no longer worked at the campus. The

assistant principal was new to the campus and this was his first assignment as an assistant principal, he previously taught at the high school level.

Kate was not hired until a few days before the teachers reported to work in August. She wanted a Math and Science position, but one was not available. An English Language Arts/Social Studies position became available in August and her principal, remembering Kate from her student teaching, called and offered her the job. The principal told me that she would have hired Kate sooner, but she knew Kate wanted a Math and Science position and those were all filled.

The student and staff population of the campus is significant to understanding Kate's perceptions of her enculturation. According to the principal, the student population was about 83-85 percent Hispanic, seven percent African American, and only about five percent White, with 91 percent of the students being labeled free and reduced lunch, and all of the K-4 campuses that fed into them were economically disadvantaged. With twenty-six teachers, eleven of them were bilingual and taught in bilingual classrooms, as they had a high percentage of students who were LEP (Limited English Proficient) or ESL (English as a Second Language). Kate's principal believed that the biggest problem was not ethnicity, but the socio-economic status of the students, in fact she said, "The biggest thing - ethnicity doesn't matter - It is the socio-economic that makes a difference." The idea that "ethnicity" does not matter will be something that came up in interviews with the mentor as well and I sensed that this campus, as well as the district took a position of "color-blindness" and focused more on the economic disadvantages of their students rather than their ethnicity.



Due to the fact that this was a new campus, in the sense that this was its first year as a fifth grade center, I asked the principal about her hiring practices and if she was able to “hand-pick” her staff. The district allowed her to interview and to choose most of her staff, with the exception of two teachers assigned to her, as the district was in the middle of a district-wide reconfiguration, with two elementary schools closing. Some of the teachers she hired worked under her at a campus where she had previously served as an administrator, and some of them worked on this campus the year prior. In the principal’s mind, for her, this felt as if she was blending two of her families and she felt good about working with people she had worked with previously.

Along with Kate, there were 5 new teachers on the campus. Because the principal hand-picked her staff, I asked her about her feelings towards the hiring of new teachers. She said that it did not matter to her whether someone was a new teacher or not, but that she hired a teacher based on the feeling she had or the connection she felt during the interview. In terms of Kate, the principal said that she felt more eager to hire Kate having known Kate previously.

When I asked her about her experience with starting a new campus and establishing a new campus culture, she shared that in her mind, she felt all of her teachers wanted to be there because many of them worked to obtain a different certification, as they did not hold the grades 4-8 certification, and only about four of them had taught fifth grade prior to this school year. She said, “They worked hard to stay. They all wanted to be here. They all believe that they could make a difference and make it successful.”

Kate's principal had high expectations for the teachers. She said that she expected them to be professionals and to be "grown-ups and leave their adult issues at home." In her mind it was about the students and she fully expected them to put the children first, while working hard. She liked it when her teachers took charge of a situation and trusted that she would not reprimand them for doing that. She wanted to create a culture where they all worked together to make this a successful school, and she did not want them always waiting for her permission to do something, she wanted them to feel empowered and to take responsibility for their work and their students' performance. She knew fully well that she could not do it alone and that her teachers had to be proactive and fully invested, while feeling safe to try new things and take responsibility for the outcome.

As a part of the discussion of understanding the school context it is important to know why this school formed into a fifth grade center. Several times throughout the year Kate mentioned that the principal was responsible for the idea of making this a fifth grade center. I asked the principal about this in our interview. She said that she began thinking about this in 2007, in a graduate class. Her current superintendent was her professor at that time and they discussed how the fifth grade science scores always kept the elementary schools at lower ratings. The principal thought that if they could just take the variable out and remove the fifth grade classes from the elementary schools, create a fifth grade center while making the elementary schools kindergarten through fourth grade, this would raise the ratings of the elementary campuses. In her words, "It just makes statistical sense." As the principal of the fifth grade center, she was willing

to take the hit, if her campus had a poor rating, if the rest of the elementary schools could benefit without the fifth grade classes. In terms of ratings, her goal was to make this fifth grade center a successful model. Throughout the year I know that Kate, along with the rest of staff, worked very hard to help achieve this goal while focusing heavily on each individual student and how their progress evolved throughout the year. This was achieved with each teacher receiving the previous year's scores of each student, setting specific goals for each class and each student, regular assessments, teacher-principal conferences after each assessment, tutoring during and after school, and much more.

### **Relationship with the Mentor**

To understand the role mentoring played in Kate's perceptions of her enculturation into this campus, it is important to understand the district's mentoring program and how it serviced new teachers. According to the district's website:

The teacher coaches are master teachers assigned to first, second, and third year teachers in the district providing support in key areas. The program assists in ensuring a successful orientation into the district through regularly scheduled classroom visits, regular communication and assistance in such areas as: district policies and procedures, curriculum, instruction, teaching methodologies, discipline and classroom management, and department contact information.

These teacher coaches were assigned multiple teachers at multiple campuses and spent their time floating from campus to campus. The district also stated that this program "will increase new teacher retention rates and aid in retaining a highly qualified work

force.” They believed that their program “helps to ensure that teachers new to the district are comprehensively inducted into the district and are knowledgeable with regard to district curriculum and instruction guidelines to provide a quality educational experience to each student in their classroom.”

The teacher coaches worked within the staff development department and had staff development training duties in addition to their mentoring duties to the first, second, and third year teachers. Most of the teacher coaches’ staff development duties were geared towards new teachers.

The five non-bilingual new teachers on Kate’s campus shared the same mentor or teacher coach assigned by the district. Kate and her teammate, Ashley, were two of these new teachers. The two shared the same students as well. Kate taught English Language Arts/Social Studies (ELA/SS), and Ashley taught math and science. Their teacher coach mentored about 50 teachers across the district at nine different campuses, including first, second and a few third year teachers; about 30 of those teachers were first year teachers. The mentor came to Kate’s campus once a week, on Wednesdays. She spent the entire school day at the campus, and spread her time between the five new teachers. The mentor had served in this position for seven years.

Throughout her tenure as a teacher coach, Kate’s mentor had seen many changes in the district’s mentoring program. When she began serving as a teacher coach seven years ago, each new teacher was assigned a teacher coach from the district, who visited weekly, but each new teacher was also assigned a campus mentor as well. The campus mentors served to help new teachers with the day-to-day things of teaching, but these

mentors were not given release time to observe the new teacher during instruction; any assistance these mentors provided was in addition to their own teaching duties and on their own time, and they did receive compensation for their time and efforts with a stipend. In contrast, the teacher coaches assigned by the district, not only had time to observe and give feedback to the new teacher, but also had the flexibility to model lessons for the new teacher, cover a new teacher's class to allow the new teacher to observe another teacher; therefore, with both the teacher coaches and the campus mentors, the new teachers received multiple layers of support as they transitioned into the profession. As the district struggled with budget constraints, they could not financially support both the teacher coaches and the campus mentors; therefore, the district chose to keep the teacher coaches and eliminated the stipend paid to the campus mentors, thus eliminating the campus mentors. According to Kate's teacher coach, the district currently allowed a principal the freedom to assign a "buddy" to their new teachers, with the understanding that these "buddies" served at their discretion, and did not receive any compensation for their time with the new teachers; they simply served out of the goodness of their hearts. Kate's principal was one who did not feel that this layer of support was necessary, so Kate did not have a campus mentor, in addition to her teacher coach.

To understand the teacher coach's function as a mentor, it is necessary to understand her definition of mentoring. She viewed her job as a form of "coaching" and she kept in mind that each new teacher had their own way of doing things. She tried to coach each new teacher in their own style, keeping in mind that some of them needed to

be pushed out of their own comfort zone. She wanted the new teachers to feel comfortable with executing the plan, while allowing them room to “come up with their own ideas of how to change things” and “reflect on their teaching.” Often she had seen new teachers try to teach like someone else, only to be unsuccessful because it was not their own style. She said that her goal was to help each new teacher be the best teacher they could be, while allowing them freedom to be themselves.

Kate’s mentor was an “outsider” to the day-to-day workings of the campus, as she was only there once a week. This had the potential to create tension between the teacher coach and the campus administration and that is why it is important to hear Kate’s principal’s feelings about the presence of a mentor, sent by the district, in the new teachers’ classrooms. Kate’s principal perceived that she had a good relationship with the current teacher coach and that this mentor was “helpful and calm and very practical,” and that the mentor’s previous experience as a counselor helped her as she worked with the new teachers. In the past this principal worked with some teacher coaches from the district that she did not feel were “beneficial” and she did not “respect” what they did. She said, “I don’t have a problem with the program. I just think it depends on the person...If I had someone who wasn’t of her [the teacher coach] quality, then I wouldn’t let them come because it could be counter-productive.”

Working with so many teachers, at so many different campuses can prove stressful for any teacher coach and takes time and energy to work with so many different principals. I asked Kate’s mentor how she felt about working with so many principals. She shared that when she began working in this position, it was a “constant observation

process” as she moved from campus to campus each year, depending on where the new teachers worked. She knew that with each principal she had to understand how involved they wanted her to be with the new teachers. She said, “Some want you very involved and some want you to do what you are asked to do – unless there is something major going on.” She recognized that the principal’s role was to serve as the instructional leader and her job, as the teacher coach, was to support whatever the principal asked of the teachers. She did not want to encourage a new teacher to do anything that went against the principal’s instructions. In her words, “I am there to support them in doing what the principal has asked them to do.” It was obvious, after talking with both the principal and the mentor, that they both shared a respect for the other and they worked well together, respecting each other’s individual duties and positions. This smoothed the path for the mentor’s work to be successful.

It is important to know that the mentor’s work was not a part of Kate’s evaluation and did not affect her professional rating. Kate’s mentor emphasized that the relationship was confidential and that her work with any new teacher could not be tied to that person’s evaluation. She described her conversations with the principal as, “What do you need our help with? What do you want us to be working on together?” The mentor did not report back to the principal, whether the person was improving or not. She felt that her new teachers “need to feel like everything they do is not reported back or documented. That relationship is important.” She often would not just spend time with the teachers during instructional time, but would also eat lunch with them, so as to build rapport and to help the new teachers to view her as a safe person, so when she did

have tough conversations with them, they knew it was coming from a trusted source. Anything that the mentor did with the new teacher could not be used as documentation to fire a teacher, in fact she said, “We stay as far away as we can, even when we are asked point blank.” She strived “to promote the success of the teacher” and she worked to make the new teachers look good; she did not want any part in someone’s firing, although she was not afraid to have difficult conversations with teachers, when needed. There had been times when she noticed that some people were failing to be effective teachers, despite her efforts and theirs. She would ask them tough questions regarding their level of comfort in their jobs and their happiness. In her words, “Are you [new teacher] committed to being that person or do you feel like that is more than you expected.” She hoped to help those who really wanted to continue in the profession to work through their difficulties, while helping to ensure that the students had the best teacher they could have, as she said:

We want the best teachers for our students at the end of the day. ... We try to provide a lot of layers of support so that [a teacher being dismissed] doesn’t happen if the person does want to stay in the profession.

To get a fuller picture of this I discussed the same topic with the principal. She supported what the teacher coach said and emphasized that the mentor did not talk to her about the mentor’s work with the new teachers, unless the mentor felt that the situation had reached a point where the principal needed to be involved. The principal felt that if a situation reached that point, then she already knew about it, without the mentor informing her. The principal felt a desire to work with the mentor, as a team, and the



principal would sometimes share with the mentor things that she saw that she might want the mentor to address, but she, like the mentor, wanted to respect the relationship between the new teachers and the teacher coach for the good of the new teachers.

As stated before, Kate's mentor came to the campus once a week on Wednesdays, but she was always open for communication via email or phone. The time she spent with each teacher varied. She sometimes met with a new teacher during his or her conference period, or she might observe then during instruction, and sometimes she just helped with whatever the teacher needed. During these times, she continued to observe the interactions between the teacher and students, looking for any ways to give constructive feedback. She and the other teacher coaches hoped to allot an hour a week for each new teacher, and about 30 minutes every other week for second year teachers. According to the mentor, the amount of time spent with any teacher depended upon the need or the situation. Sometimes the teacher coach would spend 30 minutes and another time, maybe two hours. In her mind, many of the second year teachers did not need as much help, they needed more help with curriculum delivery. Each new teacher had different needs – that was why some teachers received 30 minutes and some received two hours. She shared that she often spent less time with teachers who seemed to have their heads above water as she dealt with the ones who were drowning, even though she might have wanted to spend more time with all of her new teachers. She said:

The ones that have it down and their classroom management is good – you would like to get in there and discuss ideas – the curriculum and what they want to

teach differently. You can't do that because I see someone drowning – [speaking to the new teacher] “You are on the shore – we have to come back to you later.”

In reality, with mentoring fifty teachers, she often fell far short of her time allotment goals, as represented with the time she actually spent with Kate. In her words she stated, “It keeps me busy... Sometimes I feel overstretched.”

On numerous occasions Kate shared with me how little she saw her mentor and how much that frustrated her. This was consistent throughout the year. I think that at the most Kate's mentor spent about 30 minutes a week with Kate, but usually she spent only about 15 minutes. Some weeks she failed to come see Kate at all and several times Kate expressed that it had been a while since she had last seen her mentor. Some weeks the mentor simply placed sweets in Kate's box and maybe shot her an email of encouragement; while other weeks the mentor only spent five to ten minutes with Kate. Kate's frustration came through in comments such as these, “I don't feel I get enough time with her ... Sometimes it is kind of stressful to get any time with her [the mentor],” or “I don't meet with her ever.” At one point Kate began to feel apathetic about seeing her mentor. She expressed that she did not care whether her mentor came or not and felt like her mentor often got in the way of Kate getting work done. She also expressed that she wished that her mentor was on campus daily to answer her questions when she had them, or so Kate, at any time, could run over and say, “I don't know what I am doing here.”

Near the middle of the school year, the district required Kate to fill out a mid-year survey about the mentoring program. One of the questions asked about the amount

of time the mentor spent with Kate each week. Kate felt she could not be honest, because her name was on the survey. She wanted to put 15-30 minutes a week in response to the question, but responded with 30-45 minutes because she did not want to be “mean.” She said:

I had to do a mentor survey – a midyear survey – and it asked how many minutes do you meet with your mentor a week. She’s nice and it has my name on it – I really wanted to put 15-30 minutes, but I did the 30-45 minutes because I didn’t want to be like mean. She is helpful if I ask. She is not helpful in that she is never there. It [the survey] said, “What are some ways to improve?” You could put “spend more time” and I did that. Well I never see her.

Towards the end of the school year, Kate felt like she saw her mentor more often, but more than once expressed how she really needed her mentor more the first semester when she was drowning; although she enjoyed seeing her mentor more, she really needed her more at the beginning. She said, “First semester it would have been nice to have someone more consistent.”

Not only was the relationship between Kate and her mentor strained by lack of time spent together, but also with Kate’s lack of understanding in terms of the purpose of her mentor. Kate did not meet her mentor until several weeks into school. When Kate met her mentor she was not sure who this person was or what her purpose was. She had no idea what a “teacher coach” was and she certainly did not realize that this person was there to help. Kate’s first thought was:

Uhh – another person to come in my room ... I didn't know her purpose ... She had a binder with her and she gave me something I was supposed to read. I thought she was like someone who comes around to evaluate you every now and then ... I was like [very sarcastically], "Awesome. I can't wait."

Kate was hesitant to ask her mentor for help and she was resistant to utilize the help of her mentor; throughout the year she carried that hesitation with her. By the time Kate realized who this person was, she did not know what to ask, when to ask, and how her mentor could help her. I do not think that she ever fully took advantage of her mentor and the support she could provide. In Kate's mind her mentor was to help with things such as professional development hours or questions about getting ESL certified. She often shared how she hoped that her mentor would observe her more and give constructive feedback. Kate mentioned several times that this was what she really wanted. She enjoyed the kindness and positive attitude of her mentor, but she never felt as if she received the feedback and instructional help that she truly wanted.

Kate held affection for her mentor as a person and she often used words like "sweet" and "nice" to describe her mentor, but she felt great frustration with the lack of time her mentor spent with her and the lack of help she received. This was demonstrated through statements like, "What mentor?" Her mentor did send her some things via email that Kate felt were helpful and Kate said that her mentor was a great help whenever Kate asked for something, but she wanted more face-to-face time with the mentor. Kate never quite knew where her mentor was on the Wednesday's that she came and she never knew when her mentor would drop into her room. When her mentor did come into her

room it was often stressful for Kate and seemed more of a burden and disruption than a help. Kate said, “She comes at the wrong time.” Some of the times Kate’s mentor came, she wanted to spend some time with Kate reflecting on Kate’s teaching. Kate felt that their time together could be better spent if her mentor observed and provided constructive feedback. Kate said:

I want to use that time efficiently, so talking about how things are going – I feel like is a waste of time. ... I wish ideally she was in my room to observe and then give some feedback. I feel that would be more helpful than asking me how things are going. ... I would rather have someone who is more constructive. ... It would be so much more helpful if she was actually in my room and saw and had helpful suggestions ... because that is what I am lacking is creative ideas.

Kate wanted someone in her room, giving her ideas and helpful suggestions. She also wanted to have an opportunity to observe other teachers in her same position. As mentioned earlier, the district expected the teacher coaches to be used for these very things: observing, giving constructive feedback, modeling lessons, covering classes so the new teacher can observe other teachers – these are the very things Kate desired. If these were a part of the teacher coaches’ function then it was obvious that Kate was not aware of it and was certainly not afforded these opportunities. So what did Kate think the purpose of her mentor was? She felt like she was an encourager – a breath of fresh air – not another person to tell Kate what to do, even though Kate expressed that at the beginning she wished her mentor would have told her what to do; Kate would have

welcomed the support. She felt like no one, including her mentor, really understood how difficult the beginning of the year was for new teachers. She said:

I don't have things to pull out of the hat. Sometimes I feel like teachers forget that once they get past the new teachers phase. New teachers don't know everything. ... I didn't have anything and I was like, "Why doesn't someone tell me what to do please."

The thing that Kate felt like her mentor helped her with the most was keeping up with her required professional development hours. Kate felt that her mentor would break it down for her and tell her exactly what course to take and when. She said that her mentor was really "calm" and "gets it straight" and was very quick to answer any of Kate's questions in regard to this matter, but Kate did not view her mentor as someone to help in other matters – such as curriculum questions. In Kate's mind she thought, "Why would she know that?" Kate felt those were campus issues and that she should only ask her mentor "global questions", and later admitted that she did not know what to ask her mentor. I was curious if Kate felt afraid to ask her mentor questions, her response: "The only thing I would be afraid to ask is, 'What is your purpose,' because I don't want to be rude, but to ask her any question about school ... I just don't see her enough." At one point Kate did seem to realize that maybe she should be more proactive. Several times she said that her mentor encouraged her to ask questions, but Kate continued to hesitate. At one point, Kate shared, "Maybe I should be more intentional with using her as a resource. I dunno ..." This was mid-year and it did not appear as if Kate followed through on this thought as the year progressed. She did not view her mentor as a

“resource” – she viewed her as an encourager and as the person to help her with her “global questions”. As Kate said:

I kind of like that her role is more encourager than tell you what to do person. ... [Telling me what to do] that would have helped in the beginning because I literally felt like a chicken with my head cut off and I am like, “I have no idea what I am doing.”

Throughout the year Kate repeatedly said that she wished she had a mentor at the campus level. She expressed this several times through emails and during our interviews. She wanted someone, on campus, as she said:

I wish I had a mentor teacher that was actually on campus that I could go to and ask all those random questions you have throughout the day. Just someone to kind of lean on for help that knows what they are doing.

Kate did not feel she had that person, in fact she said, “I don’t have a teacher that is assigned to me that I am allowed to be annoying to ... a teacher assigned that’s mine.” She expressed repeatedly that she wanted someone on campus who could be her “go-to” person whenever she had questions, someone that she felt safe with, whom she believed would not judge her for not knowing something. For her, the teacher coach could not be this person because the teacher coach was only on campus once a week and Kate only saw her for a few minutes. Kate expressed that she often had her questions answered by the time her teacher coach came for the weekly visit. This could have been why Kate did not use her mentor as more of a resource.

Kate's mentor shared this dilemma. Although Kate's mentor believed that the district level "teacher coach" served a vital role, she thought that a campus mentor would be an added benefit and would provide another layer of support for the new teachers. She said:

I really feel like that you do need a person on your campus that is your buddy – not the person you have to find, but the person that finds you. The level of district support is crucial as well because that person has release time to help you, but I think a level of campus support would be good because you would have someone to ask the questions that are day-to-day.

Kate's mentor was aware that she could not provide this kind of support; furthermore she recognized that this type of support was very beneficial to the new teachers.

As I mentioned earlier, Kate's principal was one who did not feel this layer of support was necessary and therefore she had not assigned a "buddy" to Kate or to any of the other new teachers. In her mind this type of support should come from the new teacher's team or other people in the same content area. In regards to the old practice of assigning a campus mentor she said:

I just felt it wasn't really necessary because I feel like we all need to take care of the new teachers, especially the team. I am a big proponent of the team helping – the team leader taking that role – or other people on that team to do that. ... I think in the old days it [a mentoring program with a campus mentor] was beneficial because they [new teachers] were so isolated. You needed someone to show you how to do the forms, but now it is different. ... I just don't think that



they [campus mentors] are necessary anymore. ... Their work was duplicated.

They [new teachers] have teammates, friends, strategist – why would you go to one person to ask them how to do something? You have a whole building of people who know.

In regards to Kate, the principal acknowledged that Kate was on a smaller team therefore all of the ELA/SS teachers should support Kate in this way. This opinion fed into Kate's principal's expectations of her staff, but I am just not sure they were clearly communicated to the staff. From Kate's perspective, this did not seem to be happening. From the principal's perspective this should be happening, the teachers should be helping each other and seeking help from each other. In her mind the culture of the school was that a new teacher should feel as if they could go to anybody for help. She said:

I think initially they may not think they can [go to anybody for help]. They soon learn. When they can't it is their personality. ... I think if they are not going to other people it is their own notion that they can't. They soon learn they are expected to do that. It is their own personal professional development to seek out help and ask questions.

Since this is the first year for this campus to be a fifth grade center and many of the teachers, whether experienced or not, are new to teaching fifth grade. The principal felt that they were all on the same "learning curve" and none of them knew what they were doing, especially at the beginning of the year. In her mind this created a culture where everyone should feel safe enough to ask questions, as almost everyone was new to

teaching fifth grade. She felt that the few teachers who had previous experience with fifth grade had become the resources for everyone.

As far as her role in helping with the induction process of her new teachers, she believed that her role was to “convey to them what is expected of them as an employee of the district.” She also communicated that her expectation from the new teachers was student growth, but she left the content specific training to the instructional strategist and the new teachers’ teammates, especially the team leaders. She felt that the team leader was ultimately responsible for making sure that the new teacher “got it”.

It is interesting how the principal’s perceptions contrasted with the mentor’s perceptions, and Kate’s experience. The mentor shared that in her opinion it could be very intimidating for a new person to ask for help. She knew that there were people that Kate could collaborate with, but the mentor recognized that Kate did not feel comfortable with doing that. In fact several times, the mentor said that she encouraged Kate to seek out certain people for help, but Kate had not done it. The mentor felt that many teachers would not ask for help because they worried about how they would be perceived. From her experience, the mentor noticed that many new teachers did not want to be perceived as someone who did not know what they were doing and this kept them from asking questions. She also saw that many new teachers assumed that everybody else already knew what to do and they were too busy to help. In fact some of the teachers she mentored on this campus had experienced difficulties when attending planning meetings with other veteran teachers. The veteran teachers simply stated what topics they were going to cover and the activities they were going to do, but they did not

stop to explain, in detail, the activities. In the mentor's mind, these new teachers did not feel comfortable enough to speak up and ask for clarification. The mentor put it this way:

Unless someone was sitting in there to make them explain it to the new person, they didn't, and the new person doesn't want to speak up and say, "How are you going to do that?" ... I think that part is really unfortunate.

It is obvious that seeking help seems difficult for unsure new teachers, but yet it is much needed. As we see with Kate, she was unsatisfied with the help provided by her mentor and it often left her wanting. Kate's mentor was overstretched, mentoring fifty teachers, at nine different campuses. Kate's principal expected the gaps in the mentoring program to be filled by other staff members such as the instructional strategists and the team leaders. Kate did not believe that she received ample support and longed for a campus mentor. Was there any hope for Kate and her perceptions of her enculturation if her mentor failed in providing the support she needed and wanted?

### **Relationships with Other Staff Members**

In light of the fact that Kate did not have an assigned "buddy" on campus and knowing that the principal expected new teachers to go seek help either from their team or an instructional strategist, it is important to understand how Kate perceived her experiences with these particular people.

#### **Relationship with team and team leader**

We start with hearing how Kate felt about her team and how helpful they were to her. Kate's team consisted of five people, including Kate. Kate was an ELA/SS teacher

and shared her students with her team teacher Ashley, who taught Math and Science, I will spend more time on their relationship later. On Kate's team there was a self-contained bilingual teacher and another team teaching pair with one teacher serving as the ELA/SS teacher and the other as the Math and Science teacher (this was Kate's team leader); these two teachers were also bilingual teachers. Kate and her team teacher Ashley were the only teachers on their team who did not have a bilingual class, and all of their students were required to take the English version of the state test [TAKS], while many of the students on the rest of the team took the Spanish version of the state test.

As stated in the previous section, Kate's principal expected each team and team leader to "help" the new teachers, yet Kate did not perceive her fellow teammates as very helpful and she certainly did not see her team leader as a great resource. Kate said that her team leader was not a good leader and kept to herself. Kate felt that her team leader was not intentional so this made the team not very interactive. In Kate's mind if the team leader was not going to be intentional then no one else was going to be either and this really affected the whole dynamic of the team. Sometimes Kate felt that her team leader was more "freaked out" than her and Kate often felt as if she functioned as an emotional support for her team leader much more than her team leader was for her. Kate said, "My life would be less stressful if I had a better team leader." She described her team leader as "very controlling" and one who did not handle change well. Kate said that whenever there was the slightest change to their schedule it was like "World War III".

As far as the other ELA/SS teacher on Kate's team, she had similar issues. In fact, one of the times, while I was observing Kate, the other ELA/SS teacher on her team came by multiple times, asking Kate what they were supposed to be doing. It seemed Kate was the veteran teacher and her colleague was the clueless newbie. When Kate did ask for materials or lesson plans from this fellow ELA/SS teacher she was left wanting as the materials were in Spanish. As Kate put it, these kids were trying to "catch up" and be ready to exit the bilingual program that year – Kate needed materials in English. When her teammate shared something useful with Kate, the teammate would come in and spend an enormous amount of time explaining and "chit-chatting." Kate shared:

Sometimes I have to close my door. I don't have time to talk. Sometimes she will give me a copy of something and I am like, "Thank you," but most of the time it is talk. ... I don't have time for chit-chat, but I have to work.

This made Kate feel like she did not have a lot of support and help. As with the team leader, Kate often felt as if she was more of an emotional support to this teammate than the teammate was to her.

As stated earlier, the team leader and this other ELA/SS teacher were team teachers and shared the same students. Kate often felt as if she was in the middle between the two of them. She described how difficult it was to deal with them and how they often tried to pit Kate against the other one. Kate said that one came in and complained about the other, and vice versa, leaving Kate in the middle – unsure of how to handle the "drama" between these two teachers. Kate described the two teachers as oil and water – she said that there could not be any two people more poorly paired in the

whole school. For Kate it felt as if one kept coming in and complaining and the other was constantly asking questions which prompted Kate to want to close her door. She shared:

With the other ELA teacher constantly asking me questions and our team leader is constantly complaining and here I am with no answers for you [the other ELA teacher] and no encouraging words left for you [team leader] because you used them all today.

Kate eventually felt she was out of sympathy for one and out of answers for the other. She said, “I don’t have time for this ... I don’t feel like we are a team.”

During one of our later interviews Kate shared that she hoped that next year she and Ashley would, together, be placed on a different team. She wanted to be paired with other teachers who were also teaching non-bilingual classes so that she could fully benefit from their assistance, but she also saw a need for her teammates to be paired with fellow bilingual teachers. She recognized that they too needed support from fellow teachers who taught bilingual classes as well. In Kate’s mind, if all of the bilingual teachers were teamed together, then they would not feel so isolated and would have plenty of support from each other.

As far as the self-contained teacher on Kate’s team – Kate never shared much about her. I think that the self-contained teacher was just that – self-contained. She too was a bilingual teacher and I do not think that Kate felt comfortable enough with asking her for help. This was a shame, because the few times I was on Kate’s campus, this

teacher appeared very competent and I think that Kate could have benefitted from her expertise.

### **Helpful relationships with other staff**

It is obvious that Kate did not feel that her team provided much support or help. In addition to Kate's team, the principal said that she expected all of the ELA teachers to provide assistance to Kate. I am not sure Kate felt she received the help she needed or was aware this was the expectation. In an email Kate said this about her interactions with other staff, "I don't really feel support around me. ...I do feel close to some teachers, but everyone sticks with their team and does their own thing." Kate also shared that she hesitated to ask others for help because she perceived that they were busy in their own work and did not have time to answer her questions. Kate also feared being seen as incompetent if she asked for help. She wanted others to see her as someone who knew what she was doing and she feared that if she asked for help then she might be perceived poorly. She also feared that some teachers would "gossip" or tattle about her needing help. Kate shared that there were a couple of teachers that she felt safe with and occasionally asked for help.

Kate mentioned several times that she and Ashley both received help from Ashley's aunt who also worked on the campus. Ashley's aunt had worked at the campus for many years and Kate respected her opinion. As I mentioned earlier Kate's faith greatly influenced her and she felt safe with this fellow teacher because they shared the same faith. Kate several times shared that she felt sure that this teacher would not go around sharing with others how much help Kate needed. Other than Kate's teammate

Ashley, this is the other staff member that Kate spoke the most positively about. More than once Kate mentioned how this teacher did things that she would expect a mentor to do, even though this teacher was not her mentor. But even with that Kate was afraid of being too much of a burden to this teacher and she often hesitated to go ask for help from this teacher. This teacher was a self-contained non-bilingual teacher who had all of the repeaters. In Kate's mind this teacher had a greater responsibility than the other teachers, since she taught the repeating fifth graders. This perception kept Kate from seeking more help from this teacher.

Kate also, shared that another teacher was occasionally helpful. She knew this teacher from the previous year when Kate was student teaching. This woman was a first year teacher at this campus the year Kate student taught there. I think that Kate felt like this teacher identified with some of Kate's feelings of being a new teacher, having been in the same situation the year prior. Kate said that several times this teacher offered help and was one of Kate's friends, but again it was rare that Kate felt comfortable with seeking help from this teacher.

Kate also mentioned that she felt very comfortable with the school counselor and described her as one of her favorite people on the campus. As with Ashley's aunt, the counselor shared the same faith as Kate and this helped bond them. Kate said that whenever she and Ashley went into the counselor's office, the counselor would stop what she was doing and give them her complete attention. It was this type of support that Kate really enjoyed and desired from others on her campus, but did not perceive she had received it from many. Kate said, "I feel like teachers who have taught for a long



time, forget what it is like to be new.” She said that no one ever presented, “If you need anything, just let me know ... Just come in my room, I don’t mind.” Kate, like many new teachers, wanted someone to explicitly state that she was welcome in their room at any moment. Kate felt overwhelmed and busy and perceived that was how everyone else felt as well, and this perception influenced Kate to not feel comfortable with seeking help from other teachers. She said:

Other people don’t have time. Most people are teaching fifth grade for the first time. I feel like everyone is like a chicken with their head cut off and are running around. Sometimes I feel like I don’t have time and no one else had time either.

Without the explicit invitation, Kate hesitated and often just felt as if she could not ask because she did not want to impose; assuming the lack of explicit invitation meant that no one was willing and able to assist her.

### **Relationship with the reading strategist**

One person on campus that Kate should have been able to seek help from, especially questions in regards to curriculum, was the reading strategist. The principal communicated this was one person who should be helping new teachers, especially with curriculum issues. The mentor also mentioned that the content strategists were people she worked with to assist new teachers. In one of her first emails to me, Kate began to paint a grim picture about her relationship with the reading strategist. This relationship would continue to be a source of discomfort for Kate. In her first email to me she said, “I do get some help from the reading strategist, but it really confuses me more than anything.” A couple of weeks later in another email Kate had this to say about her

relationship with the reading strategist, “My reading strategist gets on my LAST nerve most of the time. When we’re talking I am praying in my head for patience while she talks to me.” Kate did not have a good relationship with the reading strategist and this was due to the fact that Kate felt that there were character issues with the reading strategist.

Kate’s troubles with the reading strategist began at the beginning of the year when Kate went to the reading strategist for clarification on something with the curriculum. Kate said that the reading strategist assumed that Kate did not know what she was doing; therefore the strategist began going around the campus asking others if they felt that Kate was capable of teaching and wondering if Kate was going to make it. Kate knew this because one of the teachers that the strategist spoke with, about Kate, came to Kate and shared what the strategist said to her. Kate’s teammate, who also taught ELA/SS, told the reading strategist that she and Kate met frequently and that Kate even shared ideas with her. This frustrated Kate more, she did not want her teammate to feel obligated to lie to the strategist for Kate’s sake and Kate still failed to receive the help and support she needed. She also knew that the reading strategist communicated with the principal her doubts about Kate’s competence. Here was one of Kate’s biggest fears coming true – she hesitated to get help because she did not want to be perceived as incompetent and when she did seek help that is exactly what happened. Not only did the reading strategist view Kate as incompetent, she shared that information with other teachers and with the principal. Kate did not feel safe seeking help from this person and eventually avoided the strategist all together. One of the other ELA teachers advised

Kate to come to her for help and not seek help from the strategist because of this. Kate said, “So I don’t really [ask for help], I choose to avoid her in situations like that. I would rather go to another teacher and ask her opinion, instead of the reading strategist.” Towards the end of the year, Kate shared that she perceived that the reading strategist was a “spy” sent to make sure she could do her job. This kind of perception only strained the possible relationship between Kate and the reading strategist.

One of the things that frustrated Kate the most about the strategist was, in Kate’s mind, the strategist failed to follow through with what she said she would do. Kate said, “There are character issues that I don’t love.” Kate shared that at one point in the year the reading strategist said she planned to pull students out to work with them in small groups – this never happened. The strategist said several times that she would observe Kate doing small groups, and so they scheduled times for this to take place, several times. The strategist either failed to show altogether or showed up an hour late, and then wondered why Kate had already done the small groups. Kate felt that the strategist never owned her mistakes and would, as Kate put it, “throw the teachers under the bus,” if something went wrong by telling the principal that it was the teachers’ mistake. Kate also perceived that the reading strategist and the principal were good friends and Kate felt that made it difficult to be in conflict with the reading strategist. Kate said:

The big thing is that the principal thinks that she does a really good job, but from a teacher’s perspective, she doesn’t do a good job. ... People just tolerate it. ...

She is not doing a great job at what she does. She leaves the teachers frazzled when she leaves the room, rather than peaceful and aiding.”

Kate believed that the reading strategist was to provide help and support. She perceived that the math strategist provided her team teacher Ashley helpful support and Kate expected the same from the reading strategist, but felt she received more trouble rather than assistance.

During my second visit to Kate’s campus I witnessed an issue between Kate and the reading strategist that corroborated Kate’s perceptions. The school was in the midst of TAKS review and they were doing rotating reviews where, within each team, the students were divided by ability and each teacher was to take a portion of the students to review. Kate was given the mid-level students, while the reading strategist was to take the weakest students.

The reading strategist developed the schedule, divided the students, and provided the teachers with the necessary materials. When it came time for the rotating review, Kate sent the strategist’s portion of the students to the reading strategist and her fellow ELA/SS teammate did the same as well. When the students arrived at the designated place, the reading strategist was nowhere to be found. Kate left her room in search of the reading strategist. Kate returned several minutes later having finally located the strategist and properly delivering the students.

Towards the end of the specified time, the students from the reading strategist’s group returned ten minutes early. This left Kate and her teammate confused – they were both under the impression that the students were to stay with the strategist the entire

time. Kate felt confused and uncertain, and even had me read the memo to reassure her that she read and understood it correctly. At the end of the school day, Kate went to confront the strategist. When Kate returned, she shared that the strategist had said that she had always intended to return the students early because she was scheduled to assist another team in a similar way, and that Kate and her teammate should have known that and they were responsible for figuring out how to handle the extra ten minutes. What frustrated Kate the most was that this was never communicated to either her or her teammate and she felt that the strategist was deflecting the blame onto Kate and her teammate.

The next month I followed up with this more and Kate shared that the strategist had emailed the principal that Kate was upset about having so many students to work with during the rotating review. In Kate's mind this was a lie and not what the issue was about at all. She was not sure how to handle it without appearing like an "emotional baby". Kate perceived that the principal always sided with the reading strategist due to their friendship. Kate said:

I just decided I would calm down. ... I have never seen her own a mistake. She will put the blame on someone else. ... The favorite line is drawn. I know she is on the favorite side. I am going to get over it.

Kate expressed that she was most concerned about her students. The ones that the reading strategist tutored were those that needed the most help and Kate did not want them to get cheated out of their due time. Kate decided to not defend herself to the principal and moved on with the plan.

### **Relationship with administrators**

With Kate desperate for time from her mentor and not getting it, and with Kate not having much luck with her team, and obviously struggling to get along with the reading strategist, to further understand Kate's perception of her enculturation into campus life it is important to address Kate's relationship with her administrators.

Kate shared that the principal required every teacher to take a personality test called True Colors. This test divided personalities into four types or four colors. Throughout the year Kate referred to her color, "blue", many times and how the assistant principal and principal were not "blues". Kate's principal shared that she liked to use this assessment as a quick way to get to know her staff and how they worked. She used this information as she dealt with her staff, and so that each of her staff members could be more aware of their personalities and how this affected the way they worked and how they interacted with students and other staff members. The principal hoped that this would assist each person in their work, but she did not want them to use their personality as an excuse for their behavior.

Kate often said the same things about her administrators and from her perspective they were using their personalities as an excuse for their behavior. Kate viewed herself as someone who really needed to feel as if she had a relationship with her administrators. As a part of Kate's "blue" personality it was very important for her to be liked by her administrators and to feel that they viewed her as competent. Also, as a "blue" personality, Kate very much valued "warm and fuzzy" interaction with others. She knew that her administrators personality "colors" were ones that did not incline

them to be “warm and fuzzy” with others, but Kate expected that they would at least make an effort with her and many of the other staff members with the same personality color as Kate. Several times Kate mentioned that she thought her administrators did well in the professional aspects of their jobs, but fell far short in the relationship department. She wanted a relationship with them and often felt disappointed because she did not perceive that she had a good relationship with either of the administrators. Kate also shared that she felt she could better handle their criticism or directives from them if she at least knew that they cared about her as a person. In one of her first emails she shared that she felt like her administrators were “ghosts” that she only saw occasionally and she felt unsupported. Kate said:

I don’t have a relationship with my administrators. They are basically ghosts that I see every now and then. I guess that is normal, but it definitely affects my overall view of the school. I just don’t feel supported by them or that I am cared about really.

It takes time to build this relationship and with Kate being an unsure new teacher, her first experience with them critically observing her performance did not go well.

At our first meeting Kate relayed a story to me about a walk-through she had with both the principal and assistant principal. That day she administered reading assessments to her students individually. In her afternoon class, one of the assessments took her about 30 to 45 minutes – by the time the assessment finished she felt frazzled and exhausted. About fifteen minutes before the end of the day, the principal and assistant principal walked into her room, while Kate sat at her desk, staring into space,

trying to catch her breath. She panicked and quickly told the kids to begin switching back to her teammate's room, although this was a few minutes early. From Kate's perspective, this walk-through did not go well. The students were confused and the transition was sloppy, as her team teacher was not ready for the switch.

After school, Kate and Ashley went to Ashley's aunt to discuss the issue. Kate already filled with tears, heard her name on the loud speaker to come to the principal's office. She felt embarrassed as she walked through the halls with tear-stained eyes in front of other teachers. She went to the office and sat crying in front of her principal and assistant principal.

Kate expressed in our interview that she thought it was unfair for them to come to her room fifteen minutes before the end of the school day, and with her having just completed a rather lengthy reading assessment. She felt frazzled, and their entrance into the room only exacerbated the issue. Later in the year, Kate shared, that after this incident, it was about two months later before she saw the administrators in her room again. As far as constructive criticism from her administrators, Kate said, "If you come in, at least, have a relationship with me before you shoot of this terrible objective assessment."

From Kate's perspective other teachers had similar feelings and she observed that many teachers really felt that they did not have a relationship with either administrator. It is important to point out that the assistant principal was new to the school and this was his first assignment as an administrator, and that many of the staff members were new to the campus, as it was the first year to have it function as a fifth grade center. There were



several staff members who had been at the campus for several years and others who had worked with the principal at another campus. One story that Kate shared to demonstrate how she felt that the principal did not have a good relationship with anyone involved getting gifts for the administrators for boss's day. Kate, along with another teacher, had the responsibility to get the boss's day cards signed and choose an appropriate gift for the administrators. She and the other teacher spent forty-five minutes walking around the building asking for ideas from the staff members who had worked with the principal for some time. No one seemed to have an idea of what the principal would want as a gift. From Kate's perspective this showed just how little anyone knew the principal and demonstrated the lack of relationship between the principal and the teachers.

Kate also wondered why, if the principal was so into personality tests then why did she not seem to use the information. In Kate's words, "There needs to be some type of connection. ... It is not the way to go about it with someone like me, which apparently a lot of your staff is like me." Kate acknowledged that her personality did not give her an excuse to be a "cry baby", so she also felt that although her administrators were introverts, this did not give them an excuse to not build relationships with their staff. She said that they both had admitted that they were very compartmentalized in their lives, "I am at work and I don't have a personal life." To Kate this seemed to not be perceived well by the staff. She said there was no "comfortability level" and there was a barrier between the teachers and the administrators, the administrators were very unapproachable. She hoped for at least a "lukewarm" feeling. From Kate's perspective, they were the administrators and she was the teacher, working under them, they had an

obligation to build a relationship with her, knowing that this would help her feel supported.

Kate did not feel supported and felt unsure of how her administrators would act if she had an incident with a parent. She wanted to know that if she had a conflict with a parent then her administrators would have her back and support her in her work. At one point Kate shared that she just did not feel as if they would stick up for her. She thought that they would just say, “That’s your fault.” She further said, “I need to feel like someone’s got my back, because I might mess up because I am new and don’t know what I am doing. Someone help please!”

She acknowledged that she was new and very unsure of herself. She wanted to know that if she was faced with this type of situation then her administrators would support her; she just was not sure that would happen.

Kate also shared a story about an interview experience she had prior to getting this job. Late in the summer, as Kate was desperate for a job in the school district, she interviewed for a paraprofessional job at another campus in the same district. From her perspective, she felt more connected to the other administrator from an hour long interview than she felt with her current administrators, even though she had been working at her campus for a number of weeks.

As mentioned earlier, Kate did her student teaching on this campus the year prior. Several times she compared her experience this year with her experience last year, with the old assistant principal. Kate said that the old assistant principal was very caring and interested in the staff on a personal level. In Kate’s mind this balanced out the

principal very well, but this year was different with the new assistant principal. Kate felt that he was even more of an introvert than the principal and only made the problem of lack of personal interaction more difficult. She felt that neither of them understood people who cried about their feelings. She and Ashley did attend a training meeting with the assistant principal that lasted several days, where they felt they had the opportunity to get to know him better, but she said he was back to “business as usual” when they returned. Kate said that he shared that he really wanted to be at the secondary level and just viewed this as a stepping stone. Kate understood that to mean that he was not really interested in them. She felt that he could at least make the best of it while he was at the elementary level.

Kate very much wanted to feel comfortable with going into her principal’s office, but she just did not feel that way. She shared that someone who had worked with the principal at another campus said that the principal used to have color-coded signs that she would put outside her office door. One color would make it clear that she was open and available for someone to come in and another color would indicate that it was not a good time or that she was not in a mood to talk. Kate felt it was strange for someone to color code their feelings that way, as Kate said, “This is the organized version of my feelings.” Kate felt that this might have been helpful, though, because sometimes she would go to her principal’s office and get a look that just made her feel very uncomfortable, this made her less likely to attempt this again. Kate said, “You don’t have to give hugs, just be a normal person. You are stiff-faced and act like I am bothering you when I come in and ask a question.”

Kate also felt that they expected the teachers to develop warm caring relationships with their students and in turn this would produce good results, so why not expect that from the administrators? In her mind this would have a trickle-down effect – if the teachers felt cared about then they in turn would care about their students. Kate felt that if the teachers were disgruntled then the students would be as well. She said:

If you want good results from us shouldn't you be pouring yourselves into us, not just giving us statistics? If you are looking for the domino effect to our students – if you have a bunch of disgruntled teachers, then you are going to have a bunch of disgruntled students. Then you have to pour yourselves into us, instead of just throwing data at us.

According to Kate, she most often talked to her principal during their data talks. Data talks were times where the principal and assistant principal met with each team and discussed the students' scores on the most recent checkpoint or benchmark assessment. These assessments occurred every three weeks and focused on the specific concept the teachers had covered in that time frame. The goal of these assessments and data meetings was to track the students' progress as they prepared for the state test in April. Several times Kate talked about how the principal was "all business" and "task oriented" and seemed only to talk about the test scores. In one interview she said, "I don't mind data because it helps me see what I am supposed to be doing. I just wish there was a little more personalness somewhere in the middle of it." Each teacher had a graph displayed in the hallway of the front office showing his/her results from the last assessment. It involved color coded dots for each subgroup of students. Due to the high

Hispanic population, these students' scores greatly affected the schools' rating, while other population groups may or may not affect the schools rating at the same level. Every teacher was responsible for posting his/her stickers on the graph after each assessment and they could see, in full view, the other teachers' graphs as well.

The principal shared that this was a "personal motivation" for the teachers and she felt that the transparency encouraged the teachers to do their best. She said that it was not meant to bring judgment, but to be a presentation of the facts. She expected each teacher to use the results of each assessment to "assess" their teaching. She wanted them to ask themselves questions about their planning and instruction and how it affected their scores. Kate's principal expected each teacher to fill out a packet before each "data talk" that was several pages long and forced the teachers to reflect specifically on their own behavior in relationship to the students' scores. The principal said that she was not always sure what each teacher did to "turn it around" but she suspected that it involved more intentional planning. She hoped that the packets she had them fill out helped lead them in this direction. She had high expectations for her teachers.

The principal did say her goal was to make her teachers do well. She knew that some of her teachers were not 100 percent sure she would not fire them over their students' scores, but she wanted them to do well for their own professional development. She was not one to hold her teachers' hands. At one point in the year Kate mentioned that, due to the budget, some positions would be cut. I asked her if this worried her. She responded, "I was worried about that and the principal, at our last meeting, said she

would base it on performance.” The principal referred to her high expectations as “job security” – and said, “I think Kate had 86 percent passing rate. If she can get that at this school, she can get it anywhere.”

Although Kate did not feel that she had a personal relationship with her administrators she did feel that this level of expectation did make her a better teacher. She felt that the principal was expecting them to always “be on our game all the time,” but she thought that if she had a principal who was more relaxed, then she might not be motivated to do as well. Kate did appreciate this type of professional expectation; she just wanted it coupled with a more personal relationship. She felt that the principal was “all business” and only talked to them about data and test scores. Kate said:

It is a personal thing. If I just put it on a work level, I think I would be fine.

They do a good job of what they do. I have a relationship with other teachers and I don’t have a relationship with them [the administrators] and that is what bothers me.

Kate wanted a personal relationship with her administrators in addition to the professional one. She wanted them to acknowledge that she was a person and not just an employee.

She also felt that she did not see her administrators enough. One of the days that I observed Kate, her principal did come by her classroom and she and Ashley both acted as if this was strange. They talked about how they never see the administrators. In fact, one of the times we were escorting the students in the hallway we encountered another teacher. Kate and Ashley asked the other teacher if the principal came by her room as

well and she reacted in a similar way. The principal had come to her room, but she too shared in Kate and Ashley's confusion. They all discussed how they never saw the principal.

That was not the only time we encountered the principal that day. Kate and Ashley's students presented books they wrote in science class and the principal came to watch. As the principal left, one of the students asked her if she was coming back tomorrow, as if he did not normally see her. The principal responded she would be there as she was every day.

In contrast to Kate's perspective with the frequency she saw her administrators; the principal's perspective was slightly different. During my interview with the principal I asked her about her frequency in her new teachers' classrooms. The principal told me that she was in her teachers' classrooms at least once a week, especially at the beginning of the year. She told me that she usually knew within the first few weeks "if it was going to work out," and if it was just a rookie mistake, or if it was a real problem. She felt that she had a really good handle on the situation by January or February and cut back to classroom visits every other week. At this point she shared with me the same walk-through incident, described earlier from Kate's perspective. Keep in mind she did know that Kate had shared the same incident with me. The principal said that when she walked into Kate's room, Kate was sitting at the table with a "look" on her face and the students were just "running around". The principal's response was, "What is going on?" and Kate, obviously frazzled, said they were about to switch. Now the principal had just been in Kate's team teacher's room and it did not appear that they were about to switch,

instead the mood was very different. She said that she told Kate to come see her after school.

In her office, after school, she said that Kate defended herself, by saying that she was just “having a moment” and that she had just completed a reading assessment with a student that had taken longer than it was supposed to take. Here the principal shared with Kate that, “You can’t ‘have a moment’ with eleven year olds running around.” She encouraged Kate to hang on for a few more minutes until the end of the day and then she could “have a moment”, and she suggested that Kate get help from the reading strategist if she had difficulty with the reading assessment again. She said that Kate appeared worn out and, from the principal’s perspective, she could tell that this was just a rookie mistake, she knew that Kate would figure it out.

The principal shared with me that she also would let others on campus do walk-throughs as well, such as the content strategists, the G/T teacher, the librarian, the counselor, and the lead special education teacher. They shared with her if they saw a problem and, in this case, if the reading strategist had walked into Kate’s room, then she could have helped Kate. The principal admitted that she did not know how to do the reading assessment and that was why she had content strategists on her campus. What Kate’s principal did not know, as stated earlier, Kate perceived that the reading strategist was a “spy” and Kate felt unsafe with asking her for help because she knew that the reading strategist had already reported back to the principal that she was unsure about Kate. I do not think that Kate would have welcomed the help from the reading strategist in this instance, and she felt very uncomfortable working with the reading strategist at



all. She especially did not want the reading strategist in her room for a walk-through. Kate perceived that the reading strategist was a “favorite” with the principal, and Kate was not sure that what the reading strategist shared with the principal was altogether truthful.

As the year progressed Kate began to feel better about her relationship with her administrators, at one point she spoke of how afraid she felt and how she overly worried about her administrators’ opinions of her. She often shared stories of how the assistant principal supported her with discipline decisions and helped her handle unpredictable situations.

From Kate’s perspective, the relationship changed with her principal when she and Ashley would occasionally go to Sonic during their conference time to buy a drink and, on their way out, they intentionally would stop and ask if the principal and assistant principal would also like a drink. It was at these times that Kate began to feel more comfortable and she and Ashley began to develop a more personal relationship with the principal. At one of our later interviews Kate said, “Lately she has been talking to me. I think it is because we have been getting her Sonic.” Later Kate said, “I wrote one of them a note and said, ‘I am praying for you,’ and this and that. September I wouldn’t have even ventured to send her a note.” Kate still did not feel as if it was a good standard of friendship, but she did feel good as a professional working under her principal. Kate felt that after she and Ashley made an effort then her principal started making an effort as well. Kate and Ashley bought her principal a Sonic drink on a regular basis, so the principal started placing their favorite candies in their boxes on a

regular basis. Kate said that the first semester was “all business” but as the year progressed and as Kate and Ashley started buying the drinks for the principal they began to talk about more personal things. Kate referred back to the “ghost” comment and thought, “Now I am like, ‘Why are you out and about?’” when they walked through her classroom. She appreciated the principal’s efforts to try to connect more with her and other staff members. Kate knew that she was not going to have a three hour conversation with her principal but she really appreciated that her principal was trying. Kate also reached a point where she tried to worry less about whether her administrators liked her or not; she focused on doing her job well and hoped that would show in performance.

### **Relationship with team teacher**

So far we have seen many of Kate’s struggles as she dealt with only seeing her mentor once a week, battling with the reading strategist, feeling unsupported by her team and team leader, as well as her administrators. You might question the possibility of Kate and her enculturation into campus life. The purpose of this study focused on the role her mentor played in Kate’s perceptions of her enculturation. Clearly the mentor’s role was limited, in this case. So, how did Kate feel about her enculturation? Part of the function of a mentor is to befriend or be a “buddy” to the new teachers. If Kate’s mentor was not this, then who was and how did this White female novice feel about her relationship with her students of color? Let’s begin with Kate’s teammate, Ashley. This was the first year for both of them and faith served as a big factor for each of them. They shared students and as I observed while with them, they “co-parented” in a sense,

being almost inseparable and taking on their 45 students together. They even attended some outside of school activities of their students together. Often Kate would begin an explanation of something with the expression, “Ashley and I have talked about this.” One time Kate described the two of them as a “duo”. They shared the same mentor and even she noticed the bond shared by the two, “Kate and Ashley forged a bond because they are both new and gung ho and share the same kids. They are fortunate to have that bond.” In her first email to me Kate had this to say about Ashley:

I LOVE my team teacher. We get along so incredibly well, which really is what keeps me sane most of the time. I think if it weren't for her I would cry every day. She is also a first year teacher, so we get to share what we are going through and the struggles we have. I really enjoy having someone close to me that is very similar in personality type.

Through every up and down the two of them supported one another and each was always there, for the other, as a listening ear. The fact that they were both new teachers, and the only two non-bilingual teachers on their team, helped them forge a powerful bond. As the school year drew to a close, and Kate reflected on their relationship, she said that she did not want to be separated from Ashley and she hoped they would continue to team teach. It seemed that they were able to help each other in their weaknesses and face the trials of teaching together. Kate said that she needed Ashley to tell her that everything was going to be okay and to be a source of encouragement. Kate acknowledged that she needed that encouragement to make it through the day.

As stated, they both shared the same faith and this was something that solidified their bond more and helped them survive some of the more difficult times together. An example of this was the few weeks before the state test. Both feeling nervous about the upcoming state test and feeling concern for their students and their performance, in the last few weeks leading up to the state test, the two of them met, daily, at Starbucks before school to pray for their students and the upcoming test. It was this type of behavior that demonstrated not only their care for the students, but how Kate and Ashley's relationship and shared faith helped them both survive the first year. In Kate's words, "On a support level I feel like Ashley was really important to me. I knew no matter how stressed out I was I knew there was someone there with me."

Since Kate lacked support in other areas, this relationship was crucial to Kate's perceptions of her enculturation into campus life. It is difficult to feel a part of a campus without feeling connected to other staff members. This connection gave Kate the support she needed to feel more a part of the campus in a way that no other relationship did.

### **Befriending other staff members**

Although Kate sometimes felt uncomfortable going to other staff members for help with her work, she had no problem befriending her coworkers, in fact, she stated several times that she very intentionally formed bonds with other teachers. Forming these bonds helped Kate, as she said in an email, "I have bonded with a few teachers since we last met so that boosts the morale." During our first interview Kate described herself as "extremely outgoing" and she possessed a love for people and she liked being

in relationships with people and interacting with other people. She said later about forming relationships with other teachers, “I am really intentional about reaching out to other teachers. I would rather have some relationships with my coworkers.” Kate saw value in forming friendships with her fellow coworkers and hoped that they would feel as if they could trust her and that they would feel comfortable coming to her if needed. She hoped by reaching out to others intentionally and showing genuine interest in them would help others feel comfortable with her. This was something that Kate and Ashley often did together. Kate said there were times when other teachers would say they wanted to be on a team with Kate and Ashley because they were both very encouraging.

Kate demonstrated her intentionality about bonding with and caring for the other staff members by writing every member of the staff a personal note in the spring semester. She said that as they were preparing for the state test, the principal encouraged them, in a meeting, to turn the person on their right and say something encouraging. This prompted Kate to personally write an encouraging note to each staff member. She was so determined that she wrote them all in one evening. She was a little nervous about how it would be received, but for several days following the note-giving she said that she continued receiving “thank yous” from people. What was most astounding was that Kate knew a little something about each person and was able to write a note to each one with a personal touch. One note she wrote she stated, “I don’t know you very well, but I have noticed ...” That teacher replied, “You’re right we don’t know each other well, but I have noticed in you...” It was a great amount of work, but in the end Kate felt that it was worth it and, from her perspective, it was a huge morale booster.

Kate highly valued knowing every teacher's name and something personal about each one of them and she was shocked to know that some teachers did not even know everyone's name. Kate said she not only knew each of their names, but knew if they were married, if they had children, and other details similar to that. Kate said, "I want people to feel like I care about them."

In terms of how Kate viewed herself and her role on the staff, during our last interview, she shared that one of the other teachers told Kate that she brought a vibrant energy to the staff with her positive outlook, and that Kate was very encouraging. Kate hoped that people felt they could trust her and know that she would not gossip about them. She hoped to be a source of light to the campus. Despite feeling overwhelmed by the work and lack of support, Kate was able to reach out to others on a personal level and feel as if she was significant to the campus culture.

### **Relationships with Students and Parents**

Kate did an excellent job fitting in with the other staff, but how did she do with her students and their parents? She was a White female working at a campus with a student population consisting of mostly Hispanic and socio-economically disadvantaged students. She worked in a district with a large Hispanic population. It is important to understand how the district and the campus leadership helped their staff members work with students from different cultural backgrounds and what kind of employees they sought to work in their schools with their students. About half of the staff, at Kate's school was White, including the principal and assistant principal. This was a campus with a high number of bilingual classes, so many of the bilingual teachers were native

Spanish speakers, but many others, like Kate were White and knew little to no Spanish. Ethnicity was not the only factor to consider, a large number of these students were considered economically disadvantaged. On my visit to the school, I talked to Kate about what she knew about the neighborhood surrounding the school. She said that much of it was government housing – the houses near the school looked “nice” but Kate had heard that they were also government housing and were poorly constructed. The apartment buildings directly across from the school looked more like housing that one might refer to as “government housing”. I also noticed, driving near the campus, several of the businesses had some of their signs in Spanish.

Knowing that the principal hand-picked her staff, it is important to know if she had a particular type of person in mind when she hired her teachers. In her mind, she wanted someone who was willing to make relationships with the students and someone who “realized the importance of that.” She felt that the biggest factor to consider involved the socio-economic status of the students. From her perspective, many of these students lacked the exposure to many experiences because of their socio-economic status, and she hoped to provide some extra help to the students through things like Saturday school or tutoring. She looked for teachers who were willing to put in that type of extra time and work.

As far as addressing the racial and ethnic differences of the teachers and the students she perceived that the students did not see any differences in their teachers and themselves. She felt that most students just wanted to have a good relationship with their teachers, regardless of racial and ethnic differences, and that is why she focused

much of her emphasis on her teachers forming relationships with their students. When I specifically asked how she helped her White teachers prepare to work with the diverse student population she replied, “We don’t. ... As far as dealing with different ethnicities, we don’t address it. The bottom line is for our teachers to form good relationships with students no matter what their ethnicity.” The district provided training, called Capturing Kids Hearts, which focused on teachers learning to form relationships with all students in general, but as the principal shared, it did not address dealing with racial and ethnic differences.

I talked to Kate’s mentor about this as well, and she gave an answer similar to the principal’s response, and pointed out that the Capturing Kids Hearts training motivated teachers to treat their students with respect and work towards “engaging their hearts to engage their minds,” but the training did not address the cultural differences between racial and ethnic groups. She did not know of any training that specifically addressed the cultural differences. As a part of this conversation it is important to point out that as mentioned earlier, Kate’s mentor was an African-American woman. This was not something that Kate ever mentioned to me and I did not discover this until meeting her mentor, at the end of the study. Kate’s mentor, as a woman of color, did not appear concerned, nor did she explicitly express concern with the fact that her employer did little to address the racial and cultural differences within the school district. It also is interesting to note that Kate, as a participant in this study, with a focus on racial and cultural diversity, did not seem it necessary to share that her mentor was a woman of color.



The university that Kate attended was near the campus where she taught. According to Kate all of her professors were White and every student in her program, at least the group she graduated with, were all White as well. I asked Kate if her university, as a part of her pre-service training required any multi-cultural education courses or courses on how to work with students of color and her response was, “None, zero.” I found this interesting since her university assigned her to student teacher at this campus, one that had a large Hispanic and economically disadvantaged population. She said all they did was encourage all of them to be ESL certified.

### **Relationship with students**

Kate repeatedly talked about how much she loved her students and how good of a relationship she had with them. She told me that the Special Education team leader noticed Kate’s ability to form relationships with the students the year before while Kate was student teaching. She told Kate, “Out of all of the student teachers that came that year, you had the best relationship with the students out of all of them. You just really built that.” Kate said, “Once I have a relationship with them they would be disappointed in themselves to disappoint me. Whereas if I don’t care, they don’t care if they make me upset. So I tried that.” During Kate’s observation that was one of the things her principal complemented her on, how she had a great relationship with her students.

During our first meeting, Kate shared with me how much she valued forming relationships with people; she viewed this as a gift of hers, and felt that was part of her God-given ministry. Kate said, “I definitely feel called to teaching as my ministry. I never viewed ministry to be in the walls of the church. My ministry God gave me is

teaching.” She hoped that as a teacher, she could serve as a light in the lives of these children. She said, “I really want to help my children. I really want to make a difference in children’s lives.” From her perspective, many of her students did not have the best circumstances at home. She knew that she often spent more time with her students than many of their parents did and she felt that this gave her a high level of influence with the students. She said that she spent a large portion of her time being mother and counselor, in addition to being teacher.

Several times she saw and heard things about the lives of her students that made her aware of the fact that her life at the same age was vastly different than theirs. She lived with both her mother and father, her mother helped her with her homework, and Kate never worried about food, and she always felt secure with her needs met. Her perception of her students’ lives proved very different. She said:

Gosh, they really are precious and my heart breaks for them. They have to deal with so much compared to what I had to deal with. They are constantly in a state of fear and anxiety about something – whether that is food or their parents or their ten siblings, etc. The last thing on some of these kids’ minds is passing. She felt great compassion for them and their circumstances. Several times she spoke about how they were still just “babies” and should not have to worry about some of the things in their lives.

As a student teacher, the previous year, Kate said that she had never really noticed that her students were “poor”. She knew that, as she said, “The neighborhood was ghetto, but I didn’t think, ‘Oh these kids are poor.’” She realized that now her

perception was different because she knew much more. As a student teacher she just “showed up”, now she felt invested. She felt that her students this year shared more with her than the students she encountered in her student teaching. She now noticed, from her perspective, that some students wore the same “shabby stuff” often and some did not seem to bathe regularly. She admitted how naïve she was about her students and their lives when she started teaching.

Kate wanted them to be able to be “just kids” at home and at school. With this being a fifth grade center, at the beginning of the year, much emphasis was placed on helping these students transition from elementary school to middle school. The culture was to view the school more from a middle school perspective, rather than an elementary perspective. At first they limited the students to recess only once a week and tried to allow them to “free walk” from class to class. From Kate’s perspective, they were too young for the “free walk” privilege and this often seemed more stressful for her and other teachers than beneficial to the students. During my visits to the campus, in the second semester, I noticed that the students never “free walked” but were always escorted by teachers, in a line. It seemed that as the year progressed the school took on more of an elementary perspective than a middle school one, as Kate had hoped. Even with recess, they seemed to do recess on a daily basis later in the year.

Kate’s hope for her students to be “just kids” influenced how she approached her relationship with them and how she viewed their home circumstances. One of her female students shared with Kate that her mother set her up on “date” and the girl felt very anxious about the whole affair. She shared that this was the son of her mother’s

boyfriend, and her mother and the boyfriend would be on the date also. The student's biggest anxiety resided in the fact that her mother would probably become intoxicated on the date. Kate's response to this was:

That is what is hard, we expect them to be adults and they have to deal with so many adult things. I was not like that at their age ... I don't even know if I knew what the word "drunk" meant. I had never even seen anyone drunk, much less my mom. It is like mind blowing.

Kate also shared that one of her male students continually fell asleep in class and when Kate questioned him about it, he said that he ran a paper route with his mother every night from two to five in the morning. When Kate called his mother, she responded, "We have done this for years and it has never been a problem." Kate felt concern for the boy's well-being and his ability to continue to be successful in school if he spent a portion of the night delivering newspapers with his mother. This, and other incidents, did prompt her and her teammate Ashley to speak to the counselor and the school nurse about this student.

Another encounter with a student and his home life opened Kate's eyes more to the lives her children lived. One afternoon, at the end of the school day, Kate confiscated a student's cell phone and she jokingly, in front of the student, began reading the text messages. The most recent text message was from the previous evening at eleven. The student had texted his mother, asking her when she was coming home, because he was hungry and had not had dinner yet. Kate responded, "They can't help

that they are hungry or if their mom is a drunk or that she runs around and leaves them responsible for the other children, it is not their fault.”

Not only did differing socio-economic circumstances separate Kate’s life and the lives of her students, but cultural and language barriers existed as well. The vast majority of her homeroom consisted of Hispanic students, with about half of them being bilingual, with Spanish as their first language. For several of her students this was their first or second year out of the bilingual program and into an English-only classroom. Kate felt that because the students were older, then the language barrier between her and the students did not create that big of an issue, but with the parents this created more problems, which I will address later. Kate felt, for her, the biggest barrier was that she was young and not that she was not Hispanic, but she did not feel disrespected overall because of this. She said, “I think they respect me because I show them respect ... but they talk about things I don’t understand, not a language thing, but a cultural thing.”

The example she shared involved a snack food called “Takis”. At the beginning of the year the students kept talking about “Takis” and how much they loved them, they even asked Kate if she liked “Takis” and they were shocked that she did not even know what they were. She encouraged them to bring some for her so that she could understand what they were talking about. When they presented them to her she noticed the words on the packaging were in Spanish, and they seemed like a type of chip. She even asked them one time what their favorite type of chips were, she said, “What is your favorite snack, like Doritos or Cheetos?” She was surprised when they responded, “Takis!”

For their class Christmas party, Kate made a special effort to provide Taquis as one of the chip options. Her mother and boyfriend came to help with the class party. Kate's mother passed out Hot Fries to each of the students, then, she held up the bag of Taquis and said, "I don't need to pass these out because y'all already have the Hot Fries." Kate quickly spoke up with, "No mom ... Those are Hot Fries and these are Taquis and they like them." Kate's students responded with a loud cry, "Taquis!"

Although Kate's class consisted mainly of Hispanic students she did have some students that were not Hispanic, who like Kate often felt the cultural differences as well. When it came to buying candy treats for her students, the Hispanic students often wanted a candy called Lucas, she said, "They [the Hispanic students] don't want the lollipop and the Black kids are like, 'Where is the lollipop?' ... On a daily basis we have some cultural boundary that they have to explain to me or me to them."

Language also became an issue for some of Kate's students. One of her Black students often became upset because he did not like the others speaking in Spanish because he feared they might be talking about him. Also, two of Kate's students who were Hispanic did not speak Spanish and they were offended that the other Hispanic students assumed that they did speak Spanish simply because they were Hispanic. Kate's biggest worry with the students speaking Spanish involved not knowing exactly what they were saying. She felt that she had a few students who would be honest with her if the other students spoke inappropriately and this eased her anxiety some, but when her students spoke in Spanish she encouraged them to speak in English for the benefit of the other students who did not speak Spanish.

Kate continued her efforts to bridge the cultural gap between her and her students. She shared, “If I am going to show them that I care about them and stuff that is going on, then I need to have a better understanding of where they come from.” She and her teammate, Ashley, attended several outside of school events of their students, including, an awards assembly, a birthday party and a sibling’s christening. Kate admitted that she had never attended a christening before and she knew it was important to her student. In regards to the student’s birthday party, she said, “I knew it would be important to him. If that means something to them, even if it is ten minutes,” she would make an effort to be there. She admitted how naïve she was about the Hispanic culture and she knew she still had much to learn. She said:

There are just a lot of things to understand better about the Hispanic culture and I still have a lot to learn. It is so different than what I grew up with. I can’t say that I relate because I don’t. ... Not to look down on them – I want to know where they come from, so that I can be more understanding and more sympathetic.

At the end of the school year Kate shared that she still really loved her students and she felt sad about letting them go. She felt that she spent so much of her time with them and really enjoyed teaching them. From her perspective, their lack of motivation often frustrated her, but she only wanted the best for them. She shared, “I have spent time just really praying for the kids.” Kate hoped that her students felt they could trust her. She hoped the best for each of them and looked forward to them returning to visit her, as several had said they would.

### **Relationship with parents**

Although Kate taught many Hispanic students she failed to anticipate that many of her students' parents did not speak English. Every form of written communication she sent home required an English side and a Spanish side. Kate did not speak, read, or write in Spanish. The principal expected the bilingual members of the staff to assist in translating, both in verbal and written form for the staff members who spoke English only. Kate's principal knew that it was important for the parents to receive all the information and she felt that her bilingual staff knew the expectation, and were happy to accommodate those in need. Kate relied heavily on other members of the staff to translate every form of written communication she sent to parents and to translate for any verbal communication as well.

This language barrier proved very frustrating for Kate. In one email she wrote, "Sometimes I actually need to talk to a parent because their kid is crazy but OH WAIT, I CAN'T SPEAK SPANISH; THEREFORE I CAN'T TALK TO THEM ON MY OWN." One of her students, Carlos, proved an on-going problem for Kate and Ashley. At the beginning of the year Kate called home several times and left messages, not knowing that Carlos' mother did not speak English. She grew more frustrated as Carlos' behavior became increasingly more difficult and she still heard no response from his mother. She felt helpless when she discovered his mother did not speak English, knowing that she desperately needed to speak with his mother and yet, this seemed impossible. Kate said, "I wish I could speak Spanish. If I could, I could like, in the middle of class, whip out the phone. ... They are smart enough to know, 'She doesn't speak Spanish and my mom



won't know.'” Eventually Kate reached a point where she felt comfortable with simply asking the students if there was someone at home who could speak English. She did not feel it was offensive, she just felt it was easier than calling home, only to discover no one understood anything she said.

As the year progressed, she also felt more comfortable relying on her fellow staff members to assist her. She said, “I don't speak Spanish, but there are plenty of people who can help me. ... If I didn't have it I think I would want to die because I don't feel like I could communicate otherwise.” She decided that next year she would more proactively discover which of her students' parents spoke English or not. Not knowing that Carlos' mom spoke only Spanish, until there was a problem, did not serve her well. She planned to do a parent survey at the beginning of the next year to help remedy this problem earlier.

Other barriers existed between Kate and her students' parents besides language. Kate's perceptions of many of her students' parents were not always good. She often talked about her frustrations with the parents and their perceived lack of involvement. Kate perceived that some of the parents cared very little about their child's academic success. She realized that for many of her students, she spent more time with them than their parents. Many attended day care or afterschool programs before they went home in the evenings. Also, many of her students came from single parent homes and she felt that reflected in their behavior in class. She noticed that a number of her children had different last names than the parent listed and often no dad was listed at all, she said it

was a grandma or cousin instead. She had only a few students who lived with both parents.

Kate also perceived a lack of discipline at home and this affected the students' behavior at school. She said, "You can discipline all day, but if they have no reinforcement at home then it doesn't matter." In Kate's mind, the lack of parental involvement led to laziness in the classroom. She said, "They don't have any type of motivational drive or discipline because I don't think it is learned at home and the ones that have it at home it is obvious." Kate perceived that because of this, much of her job involved helping her students with many skills that were not necessarily educational. She said, "You need self-control and I will teach you that. I am not going to gripe you out about stuff when you are at home hungry, you don't have both parents and you don't know who your dad is." She did not want to pretend that she could relate, because, as she admitted, "I have never dealt with any of those things in my life," but she hoped to do what she could.

One story that Kate shared involved one her female students. The student seemed to lack any motivation to do her work or take it seriously. Kate inquired about the girl's home life and the girl shared that she did not sleep because her mom was often not at home. Kate shared:

She doesn't sleep because her mom is not there and has like a boyfriend situation, which is true for lots of my kids, which makes me really sad and pisses me off at their parents. Just stop having children if you are going to be like this.

It greatly bothered Kate that her students dealt with difficult situations at home and she perceived that many lacked much structure. She knew that their problems could not be fixed at school, but she hoped to help them some.

Kate thought that the parents she did interact with did perceive her as too young. One student shared that her dad, after the Meet the Teacher night, thought that Kate looked like she was twelve. Kate said, “They do that wide-eyed look, ‘You’re the teacher?’” She did wonder if they thought sometimes that she was a “snobby White girl” and if they thought, “You have to be White to have good jobs.” I asked her if she thought they may feel intimidated, she replied, “No ... It is like mom and boyfriend and they have their own thing going on and they don’t have time for their children.”

Kate perceived that education was not highly valued by many of her students’ parents. Kate’s boyfriend, as a part-time job, babysat two boys after school. His job involved picking them up from the private school they attended, bringing them home, and assisting them with their homework, until the parents came home. One day he picked the two boys up earlier, as they had an early dismissal. They were given the early dismissal to prepare for upcoming tests and Kate’s boyfriend spent the afternoon helping the boys study. In Kate’s mind this drastically contrasted how her students would behave with an early dismissal. She felt that if her students were released early to study, they would do anything but, and more than likely, there would be no one home to help them study. She thought her students would probably spend the time watching TV or playing video games.

Kate had a few parents that she felt did actively participate in their students' education; a small number of them Kate communicated with regularly. Kate did admit that some of the parents she had not communicated with at all. She shared, "There are other children who I have never communicated with their parents and I don't know who they are. ... I am actually not motivated to communicate because they don't communicate with me." She measured the parents' lack of motivation for involvement based on the poor parent turn-out for the two Meet the Teacher nights, the only parents who showed up belonged to her "good" students. These parents asked Kate to communicate with them if she experienced any problems with their children. Kate thought, "You are probably never going to hear from me about her having a behavior issue." With the other parents Kate felt, "I am not going to waste my time trying to call you when I know you are not going to answer my phone call." This perception kept Kate from reaching out to several of her students' parents.

I asked Kate if she thought, perhaps, that she might intimidate some of the parents. She was not sure if she did or not, but she perceived that her age was a bigger factor than her color "because there are a lot of White teachers at our school." She thought that maybe the students and parents just assumed that teachers were White and that was something White people did for a living. "I think they have it in their head that teachers are White. I think it is normal to them." She felt that with the few parents that were involved, she had proved herself. They could see that she involved herself with the students and this earned their respect.

Kate did not think that many of her students' parents helped them with their homework, and she felt that her job would be easier if more parents spent time helping their children do their homework. I asked her if she felt some might feel anxious about not being able to read English and that is why they did not help their children more with their homework. She felt that the real issue was that the parents simply were not around. Some of her students went home to no parents and spent the evenings taking care of younger siblings. She knew that some of her students were taken around town with their parents and their parents' evening activities, not returning home until as late as eleven, with no homework done, and no dinner yet. This irritated Kate and she struggled to feel compassion for these parents. However, when Kate did communicate with any parent she made a special effort to "be as kind as possible" and say at least something positive about the student. She admitted, "I probably throw them [parents] under the bus when I shouldn't. I just get irritated when I have one negative conversation and I am like, 'Don't you care about your kids?'" Kate had a mother who sat down and helped her with her homework as a child; in her mind that was what "good" parents did, parents who cared about their children. Her perception that many of her students' parents did not do this frustrated her.

As I mentioned earlier, Kate's student Carlos's behavior was an issue for her throughout the year. Carlos was a gifted and talented student and this was his first year out of the bilingual program. After several attempts to contact home, Kate discovered that his mother did not speak English. Kate saw a woman, who in her mind, was only 25 with a ten year old and two other children, none of them with the same father; Kate

made many assumptions about Carlos's mom and his family life. Often Carlos would talk about how his mother did not care how he behaved at school. This seemed affirmed by the fact that when Kate and Ashley scheduled parent conferences, Carlos's mother failed to show up numerous times and it was May before they finally had a parent conference with her. Kate and Ashley did attend the christening for Carlos's sister and brought gifts. I do believe that they formed some kind of bond with Carlos's mother after the christening and the parent conference in May.

For Kate's birthday, in May, Carlos's mother brought a cake to school and verbally thanked Kate and Ashley for the christening gifts, via a translator. Both Kate and Ashley's classes joined together to sing Happy Birthday to Kate, in both English and Spanish. Before Carlos's mother left, Kate offered a piece of the cake to her before Kate divided it amongst the students. Carlos's mother said no, but then said something in Spanish to Carlos and they both began laughing. Carlos said that his mother did not want a piece of cake but wanted to see Kate "bite it". Kate, completely clueless, asked what they meant. Several other students joined with Carlos and his mother and their request, saying, "That is how the Mexicans do it." The tradition involved the birthday person taking the first piece of cake, and either trying to eat it without any utensils, or, someone else shoving the birthday person's face into the cake. Kate decided to go along with it, as she took the first piece, the whole class chanted, "Bite it, bite it." Kate put her face into the piece of cake, to a round of cheering and excitement. She saw that Carlos' mom was excited. Kate said that she would willingly participate in cultural activities like this if she only knew. She said, "Why can't I have a little guide book. I don't mind

doing traditional things like that, but I don't know what they are.” Kate was excited that Carlos's mother came for her birthday but, she only wished they established a line of communication earlier in the year.

Overall, Kate felt that she had developed a good relationship with many of her students' parents. She felt that several of her parent conferences had gone well and she could not think of any parents with whom she had a “bad” relationship. Kate discussed that next year she planned to communicate with parents more, about both the good and the bad. Kate viewed herself as willing to learn more about her students and their home life in an effort to provide the best education for them. Kate might have been able to handle many of these situations better with the help of a campus mentor. Despite the fact that she did not have a mentor at her campus, it seems Kate learned a lot and still formed meaningful relationships with her students and some of her students' parents.

### **Enculturation into the Profession of Teaching**

We have seen how Kate perceived her enculturation into campus life through the relationships she formed with the other staff, her administrators, her students and their parents, but how did Kate perceive her enculturation into the teaching profession? Kate's mentor viewed her role more as one who helped Kate become a part of the teaching profession more than one who helped Kate become a member of her campus, but she was open to answering any question, or at least helping find the answer. It is important to see how Kate perceived her induction into the profession of teaching to fully understand how she felt about her enculturation into the campus life – the two cannot be separated and are intertwined.

### **Perceptions of lack of preparedness**

At the beginning of the year Kate's overall feeling could best be described as overwhelmed. As stated earlier, she was hired only a few days before the teachers reported back to work and she had no time to mentally prepare for her new position. She had hoped to teach math and science, but as the summer wore on, she grew desperate to take any position offered her. Days before school started, Kate accepted the position for an ELA/SS teacher at this fifth grade center, where she student taught. Kate had no pre-service experience in a fifth grade classroom. She did not have a fellow English-only ELA/SS on her team with which to pair, and her relationship with the reading strategist could not be described as good. Her interactions with her mentor were minimal, at best. In her first email, Kate described her perceptions about teaching in the following way:

I sometimes go home feeling walked all over and I just would like to have more days where I am feeling really good when I go home. ... I definitely feel so much more stress than I ever could have imagined going into this. I just wasn't prepared for the emotional overload I feel on a daily basis. I still love it and know that God has me teaching and it is a passion of mine, but I think I just didn't realize how much I was going to have to depend on Him in order to get through those days when my kids are crazy and I have no confidence in what I am doing.

The feeling of complete exhaustion continued with her throughout the first several months. Kate described that during her student teaching experience she would just show up and the cooperating teacher already prepared everything. Kate simply



walked into the moment, without any concept of the amount of work her cooperating teacher had done beforehand. She enjoyed her university teaching program and felt as if she learned a great deal, but she did not feel she fully experienced every aspect of teaching in her pre-service training. She said, “Student teaching did not prepare me for teaching. ... I don’t think there is a way to prepare you. [Unless] If they forced you to do everything the teacher does.” During her student teaching she was not required to attend things such as faculty meetings, so she did not go. She said, “I didn’t have to go to any conference meetings. I wasn’t required to. Why would I if it is an option? Like faculty meetings – I didn’t have to go.” Her cooperating teacher made all of the lesson plans, so Kate never made any lesson plans of her own; she simply used the ones given her. Kate said, “I guess with lesson planning – someone would say, ‘You are teaching tomorrow. Why don’t you do this?’ I didn’t see like any process of what all you have to do.” She felt shielded from the “dark stuff”, which at the time she felt grateful for, but now she felt that sheltering only handicapped her. There were so many things she did not see or experience, that now she was responsible for knowing how to do and do effectively. She said, “You don’t see everything [in student teaching]. You just see the final result, but never see what happened. ... I thought you just showed up, you teach and go home.” She wished she had taken more notes. She would now advise student teachers to pay attention to everything, go to all meetings, ask the teacher how they plan, ask if you can do everything possible.

At the beginning of the year, Kate several times kept waiting for someone to tell her what to do, only later to discover that no one was going to do that. She felt that she

was expected to know everything and yet she felt as if she knew nothing. Sometimes she felt as if she was faking it, thinking that her students probably had a better idea of what she was supposed to do than she did. She often did not feel comfortable asking for help and she felt that many teachers forgot what it was like to be a new teacher. Kate said:

Sometimes I need someone to tell me what this lesson is wanting me to do.

Could someone spell this out for me? All the random things – they want us to do tutoring after school, come up with a parent letter in Spanish and English, and figure out a schedule and give it to the principal, and now Saturday school.

You're kidding me. When am I going to rest? ... As a student teacher they already have schedules and discipline sheets – all of that, and you just show up and are a part of it. So here I am creating it. I just get confused sometimes.

What am I supposed to be doing?

She wanted someone to come and say, “If you need anything just let me know,” but no one ever did. Looking towards the future, she hoped that she might someday be paired with a new teacher. She felt as if she would “swarm” the person and explicitly let that teacher know that she would help with anything because she did not want anyone else feeling as overwhelmed as she did.

### **Perceptions of teaching overall**

Although feeling unprepared overwhelmed Kate, she felt her expectation of loving her students was met, but that was often overshadowed by her sheer exhaustion

and stress. In one email she shared with me that she did not know if she could do this for the rest of her life. She said:

Uhhh. I worry a little about doing this my whole life. Not that I am completely changing my mind, but I just want it to be less stressful. I want to be able to go home every day not feeling overwhelmed and I want to feel like I know what I am doing. I think I just need to give it time or at least that's what I have heard. I just need some confidence in what I am doing I guess.

It is obvious that Kate's teaching experience was not as easy as she had anticipated, but she was willing to hang in there longer. Late she shared with me that she did not really want to quit, she just felt exhausted. She said:

It is not like I want to quit, I just want to sit down and cry. I am like worn out, but I really do love it. I know it is where I am supposed to be. It is a matter of character building. I have a lot to learn, no new person knows everything.

She described her feelings as coming in waves and based it on stress. Sometimes she felt as if everything was going well and then other days she felt completely defeated by her students' performance. She thought she worked so hard and yet there were times when her students' grades did not reflect it. She said, "I know I am working hard and I wish my results produced that as well."

She also felt overwhelmed by the many non-teaching aspects of her job. She said that often she served as "a counselor, doctor, mother, father, sister, mentor, friend, and, oh yeah, a teacher." She knew that her performance was judged on her students' test scores, but she thought she could not get to the instructional aspect of her job until she

dealt with the other issues her students brought to class. She did not want to be unsympathetic, but she often thought, “Oh my goodness. How am I going to counsel this child in ten minutes or less so we can get back to work?” She felt as if she juggled many things and often felt discouraged.

At one point in the year she shifted her view. She realized that as a first year teacher, she was new to this and had never done it before. She could not expect herself to know everything and do everything well. She knew she could do better, but she was going to keep moving along. She felt as if she experienced an identity crisis; she began basing her self-worth on her work. As the year progressed, she realized what she was doing and decided to approach work, knowing that it mattered, but that her life was not school. She said:

I had an identity crisis and I was like “Okay, my self-worth is based on work,” I realized how stupid that was because I haven’t lived my whole life like that and I am like work matters, but my life is not school. God doesn’t judge me on my students’ reading ability. All first semester I am like people pleasing with my principal and administrators and how I am doing. I can’t make my life about work because that is ridiculous to me. ... live for something higher.

She knew she could do it, but that it was going to be hard. She relied on her faith as a source of strength and used that to help her drive through the difficult times. She said, “I would have hated my life if I didn’t have Jesus – that is what gets me through every day. ... I don’t have to have my TAKS results with me to get into heaven.”

There were times when she felt good about what she was doing. She said that she even wondered if another teacher might benefit from something she had done, but then she assumed that no one would want something a new teacher had created. Sometimes she lacked confidence in herself and her work. She was pleasantly surprised when someone did come to her room asking, “What did you do?” She thought, “I feel like I did something right for the first time, point for me!” It uplifted her to know that someone thought that her work was worthy of sharing.

Her reflections on the year made her realize that her experience forced her to go through different things on her own. She described it as being thrown into the lion’s den, but she learned to problem solve and eventually achieved success. Late in the year she shared, “I’m gaining my footing and feel I am slipping into a groove.” She looked forward to the next year and an opportunity to work through some of the mistakes she made this year, and trying out new ideas she had.

### **Visions for the future**

During our last interview I asked Kate to describe where she would like to see herself in the future. Several times she expressed that she desired to maybe become an administrator. She shared that one of her professors, during her pre-service training, told Kate that she saw an administrator in her. Kate did not feel quite as confident, but she toyed with the idea of going back to get a master’s degree. She originally thought she might go straight through after her undergraduate degree, but by the time she arrived there she needed a break. She even entertained the idea of becoming an educational professor one day, but for now teaching satisfied her. She said, “Right now I don’t think

that is where God is calling me. If I am a teacher my whole life I would be okay with it.”

### **Chapter Conclusion**

Kate began this year teaching at the campus where she student taught the year prior. Most of her students were Hispanic and many of their parents did not speak English. Kate had a mentor that she saw only once a week for about thirty minutes. She felt like her mentor was nice, but just did not see her often enough for the mentor to be much help to her. She developed a wonderful relationship with her team teacher, who also was a new teacher, but her relationship with the reading strategist and her administrators needed improvement. She was afraid to ask for help, because she wanted the other staff members to think she knew what she was doing, and she perceived that most of them were busy in their own work as well. Never the less, she became friends with most of the staff and built some meaningful relationships. She loved teaching and loved her students, but she worried about their home life and she had difficulty communicating with their parents because many of them did not speak English. She did not feel like student teaching properly prepared her and often felt overwhelmed throughout the year. Her faith sustained her through much of the year, and she eventually began to build a relationship with her principal and some of her students’ parents. Her mentor did not play a big role in her perceptions of her enculturation into this culturally diverse campus, but she became a part of the campus culture none the less. She felt excited about next year and looked forward to a fresh start with the new knowledge and skills she gained through the year.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to understand the role mentoring plays in a White female novice teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus. Campus enculturation refers to a teacher's feelings of acceptance, success, and value, specifically in relation to her interactions with her students, her fellow teachers, and her administrators. The motivation for this study comes from a look at the growing diversity of the student population in our schools today in relationship to the continued dominance in the number of White teachers in the teaching work force (NCES, 2009). Chances are a White female novice teacher will teach students of color and the cultural differences between her and her students of color will impact their relationship and the instruction delivery.

Most new teachers receive some level of mentoring or induction support as they enter the profession and this support greatly influences new teachers and their enculturation into the profession. The value of mentoring cannot be overlooked in terms of its impact on new teachers and their ability to successfully become a part of the profession of education (Johnson, 2001); and mentoring can have a powerful impact on helping new teachers understand the racial and ethnic differences between them and their students (Tillman, 2003). Because of this, there is a need to study and understand

the role mentoring plays in the enculturation of a White teacher at a culturally diverse campus.

This study sought to answer the following questions in regards to addressing the purpose of understanding the role mentoring plays in a White female novice teacher's perceptions of her enculturation at a culturally diverse campus.

1. What are a White female novice teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into campus life within her first year of teaching?
2. How does a White female novice teacher perceive her interactions with her students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and how does she interpret these interactions in relationship to her perception of her enculturation into campus life?
3. What role does the White female novice teacher perceive that mentoring plays in her perceptions of her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus?

I chose to do a qualitative study because I wanted to understand a White female novice teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus "with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (Merriam, 1998, p. 5) because "meaning is embedded in people's experiences" (p. 6). I chose to do a case study to gain an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon. Through this research, I observed, interviewed, dialogued through email, and reflected to make this phenomenon a part of myself, to then tell this story of this White female novice teacher, teaching at a culturally diverse campus (Johnson, 1995).



I chose to work from an interpretivism paradigm because I was interested in understanding meaning in how this first year White female teacher made sense of and interpreted her experience as a first year teacher at a culturally diverse campus (Merriam, 1994). I served as the primary instrument for data collection as I interviewed, email dialogued, and observed my subject (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam 1994).

The participant was chosen because she was a White female novice teacher teaching at a culturally diverse campus, and she had a mentor. To find this participant, I contacted the superintendent of a school district that had a student population largely comprised of students of color, and a district that provided mentors for their first year teachers. The campus chosen was a fifth grade center located in a suburban school, outside of a large metropolitan area in Texas. The student population of the campus was mainly Hispanic, with many of those students being economically disadvantaged.

I used several methods for data collection including interviews, observations, and email dialogues between the research subject and myself. These semi-structured interviews lasted at least one hour each, and were recorded and transcribed. For the observations, I shadowed the teacher for three full school days, producing field notes. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with the the new teacher's principal and mentor, each for one hour, and these were recorded and transcribed as well. I also kept a private researchers journal.

To analyze the data I used the constant comparative method of data analysis process throughout the course of the study as described by Merriam in *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (1998). I constantly compared the

data from each interview, email, and observation with the data from the previous data collections. Each of the interviews, emails, and observations, influenced the future interviews, emails, and observations. As I read through the different sources of data I discovered emerging categories, which led to the emergence of themes. I then grouped the data collected into these themes. Some questions that began to arise included: Is the new teacher receiving the help and support she desires from her mentor? How is she feeling about her relationship with her students and their parents? How does the new teacher feel about her relationship with her administrators? How does the new teacher feel about her teaching overall? I often sought clarification from the novice teacher, throughout the process.

To ensure trustworthiness, I implored several strategies, as described by Merriam (1998, 2002) in *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* and *Qualitative Research in Practice*. I had prolonged engagement as I studied the teacher over the course of a school year. I conducted member checks by clarifying the data with the participant after my analysis and reflection of each interview, email, and observation. By using multiple methods of data collection I triangulated the data. In terms of typicality, often new teachers receive mentoring from veteran teachers, and it is not uncommon for a White teacher to teach students of color, at culturally diverse campuses. For peer examination, several educational researchers read and examined this study and its completed presentation.

This study is significant because, as the number of students of color rises in the nation, more White educators face the challenges of teaching and interacting with

students who come from cultural backgrounds differing from the teachers' backgrounds. The conclusions of this study may assist mentors in helping White novice educators as they learn to work with students of color. The study may also assist White novice educators with their awareness of how their cultural backgrounds affect their teaching and their interactions with students. "Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). And finally, the conclusions of this study may help district and campus administrators in the organization of an effective mentoring program based on the needs and desires of a new teacher.

## **Discussion**

Kate was a first year teacher at a campus located in a suburb of a large metropolitan area in Texas. In the previous pages, I presented Kate's perceptions of her enculturation into this culturally diverse campus by discussing the following topics: the context of Kate's campus, the structure of the mentoring program, Kate's perceptions of how her mentor helped her, Kate's relationships with her fellow staff members (including her team, the reading strategist and her administrators), Kate's perception of her relationships with her students and their parents, and how Kate felt about herself as a teacher and her induction into the profession. Now I am going to discuss my analysis and conclusions based on the data presented. I begin with the relationship with the mentor and the effectiveness of this mentoring program; next, Kate's relationship with the fellow staff members, specifically her principal and how this affected Kate's experience; then I will discuss how this district, Kate's school, Kate's university approached the issue of race/cultural identity and how this and Kate's mentor influenced

Kate's perceptions of and relationship with her students and their parents; and, finally, how Kate perceived her enculturation into the teaching profession.

### **Relationship with mentor**

To understand Kate's relationship with her mentor I need to spend some time discussing the structure of her district's mentoring program and how this affected their relationship and the influence Kate's mentor had on her perceptions of her enculturation. As the mentor shared with me, at one time the district provided multiple layers of support with a "teacher coach" assigned from the staff development department. The teacher coach came once a week to observe, model teach, assist with classroom management, and other tasks that helped with the induction of the teacher into the profession. In addition to the teacher coach, the district provided a campus mentor – or "buddy" – who was a fellow teacher, received a stipend, and assisted with the day-to-day, nitty-gritty type questions. This district, like many others, faced budgeting issues and decided to keep the district level "teacher coaches" and eliminated the stipend paid to campus mentors, thus eliminating the campus mentors. I suspect the reasoning, based on what the mentor told me, may have been that the district believed that a campus mentor could not provide the same support as a teacher coach could because, as classroom teachers, campus mentors had their own classroom responsibilities and were not given release time. The teacher coach's responsibility, on the other hand, involved the support of the professional development of new teachers only, as their full time job.

In a review the literature, I found that this type of mentoring program is often called a "full release" mentoring program (Hanson & Moir, 2008). The research showed

the successful mentoring programs, similar to this one, expected the mentor to spend one to two hours a week with each mentee, which added up to as much as 96 hours over the course of the first year (Sterling & Frazier, 2011; Fletcher & Barrett, 2004). Also, the mentors in one study were only assigned 15 teachers to mentor (Fletcher & Barrett), and in both of these studies, the new teachers had campus mentors assigned to them, in addition to the outside “teacher coach”. Kate’s mentor was assigned 50 teachers at nine different campuses, with 35-40 of those being first year teachers. Assuming that this is a 40-hour a week position and the mentor expects to allot one hour to each new teacher, then her entire job would be consumed by the 35-40 first year teachers alone. This would leave the mentor with no room for any paper work, travel between the campuses, or her duties with staff development in terms of training sessions for new teachers. Kate’s mentor told me that her goal was to spend one hour a week with each new teacher, but according to Kate, the most her mentor ever spent with her was 30 minutes a week. If the mentor met the goal of one hour with each new teacher, in a 36-week school year, then at most she would have met with Kate 36 hours over the first year, falling far short of the 96 hours spent with new teachers by each mentor in a study of a similar mentoring program (Sterling & Frazier). Also, Kate’s mentor’s assignment of 50 teachers is more than three times that as the mentors in a previous study, with only 15 new teachers each (Fletcher & Barrett). She simply has too many people, Kate even noticed this, “It is not her fault they give her so many people to mentor - she shouldn’t have that many.” The mentor herself expressed she felt overstretched. No matter how well trained or qualified a mentor may be, it is not possible to do a decent job of

inducting a new teacher into the profession by being responsible for so many teachers. Establishing a full release mentoring program addresses a common limitation of a classroom teacher serving as a mentor, in that a teacher coach is “free” to focus on new teacher development by not having teaching responsibilities themselves. This advantage is lost by assigning the teacher coach too many new teachers. The issue here is not the quality of the program or teacher coach, it is the quantity of new teachers. I conclude, from the findings of this study, that in order for this type of mentoring program to work successfully, then the number of teachers assigned to the mentor must be limited to a much smaller number than 50, so that more time could be spent with each new teacher.

The idea of this type of mentoring program focuses on the mentor or “teacher coach” being available in a way a fellow classroom teacher could not be. These mentors are not weighed down by classroom duties, so they can be available to observe the new teacher or model new lessons, or even substitute teach so that the new teacher can observe another teacher (Sterling & Frazier, 2011). Many believe that, “Teachers need to see expert practices modeled and must practice them with help” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 214). Kate expressed several times she wanted her mentor to observe her and give her feedback, but during our interviews, she only told me of one time when her mentor observed her. I know that some new teachers are resistant to help and this sometimes hinders the effectiveness of a mentoring program, despite its design and execution, but this was not the case for Kate. She wanted the help, she wanted the constructive criticism, she wanted someone to encourage her and suggest ideas. She wanted the mentor in her room observing and constructively commenting. She was

open. This is in line with what Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) said, “They [new teachers] want, in other words, to be tutored by an individual they trust without worrying too much about having to make an impression” (p. 256). I also think that the mentor had the desire to be that person to Kate, but as the mentor expressed she was “overstretched” and had to “save those drowning” and she did not have time to help those, like Kate, who at least had their heads above water. Kate survived, but would she have thrived if she had been given more attention, the attention she greatly desired? Darling-Hammond (2010) said, “Teaching cannot be learned from books or even from being mentored periodically” (p. 214), and “Although people ... do learn from their experience, they do not always learn the right things. ... [New teachers] need the opportunity to work with skillful and committed colleagues, and to be in environments where they can be efficacious” (p. 208). Kate said, “I would like her more if I was able to ask her more questions, but I would need her to be more available than she is.” At one point Kate saw her so little that she became indifferent to seeing her and expressed how she did not really care if her mentor came. This defeats the whole purpose of the program. The mentor is to be someone that a new teacher looks forward to seeing and someone they know they can depend on when they need help. The infrequency of Kate’s time with her mentor made the mentor’s role very dispensable and her mentor had very little impact on Kate’s instructional practices, thus undermining one of the goals of the program.

As far as the mentor substituting for Kate so that she might go observe a new teacher, this never happened. Kate expressed to me that she and Ashley (her team

teacher) both wished that they had a day where they could go observe another teacher in their same field – this is where the teacher coach could help in a way that a campus mentor could not. A teacher coach should be free to come and substitute for a new teacher while the new teacher goes and observes another teacher. Kate’s mentor told me that this was one of her goals as a teacher coach, but she never did this for Kate or Ashley. I speculate that she did not do this because Kate never asked her to and because she never had time, due to the fact that at this campus alone she had five different mentees, leaving little time to make this happen. I think Kate never asked her because she did not know that she could –that this was even an option. This shows a lack of communication to the new teacher about the functions and purposes of a teacher coach.

According to Kate, her mentor mainly helped Kate keep track of and complete the necessary professional development hours needed to maintain Kate’s certificate. This is an important task, one that many new teachers need assistance with, yes, but falls far short from providing enough support to induct Kate into the profession; and, maintaining one’s certification lacks worth if one cannot teach effectively and feels so overwhelmed they desire to leave the profession all together. This is too low to even be the level of minimum support.

As mentioned on the district’s website, the teacher coaches, “Assist in ensuring successful orientation into the district. ... Further, the program helps to ensure that teachers are comprehensively inducted into the district and are knowledgeable with regard to district curriculum and instruction guidelines.” These are important tasks, necessary to the induction of a new teacher. I do not think that Kate’s mentor



completely fulfilled this role in regards to the district curriculum and instruction guidelines, based on what Kate said in our conversations. Kate perceived her mentor's role as answering global questions and not questions specific to her curriculum. It might prove difficult for the mentor to obtain familiarity with every content area, but she could assist by working through the content area strategist on each campus, in fact, the mentor told me that she worked through these strategists as a part of her support to new teachers. This did not seem to happen for Kate. I believe that if this mentor continues to work with such a high volume of teachers, reliance on the content area strategist will prove vital to assist the new teachers effectively. Kate's perception of her relationship with her reading strategist felt strained and I believe that Kate's mentor could have and should have served as the person to help bridge this gap, but somehow this failed to happen. Others have pointed out the importance the role a mentor plays in connecting new teachers with "specialists in subject areas" (Kajs et al., 2001; Cross, 1995). Kate did not bring these issues to her mentor, but I think if she had then her mentor could have and would have helped her. I think that Kate did not know that her mentor would have helped her in this area. I speculate that the mentor waited for Kate to ask her questions and assumed Kate was fine on her own based on the lack of Kate's questions. Research shows us that new teachers are often hesitant to ask for help because they are concerned about being viewed as incompetent (Eick, 2002; Halford, 1998; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998). Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) said:

The mentoring relationship is special because of its entrusting nature. Those being mentored are dependent upon their mentors to help them, protect them,

show them the way, and develop more fully their skills and insights. ... They want to know what they are supposed to do. ... They want, in other words, to be tutored by an individual they trust without worrying too much about having to make an impression. (pp. 255-256)

The lesson here for mentors is – do not wait to be asked – volunteer information and support – you are the expert and your function is to transmit formal knowledge of skills, teach the rules, values, and ethics of education (Cross, 1995); new teachers lack awareness of what they do not know, so they do not know what to ask – anticipate what they need to know and answer it before they have a chance to ask it and do not judge them for asking “dumb” questions (Strong & Baron, 2004). New teachers need feedback without feeling worried about negative implications (Farrell, 2003; Eick, 2002); think like a new teacher, walk into the building with the perspective of someone who has never been there and has no idea what they are doing; remember what your first year was like and how you felt. The lesson for new teachers is – ask, ask every question that comes into your head, no matter how “dumb” it sounds in your head, ask it; assume that your mentor either knows the answer or knows who else to ask. The mentor knows the campus and the district better than you do (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998) – they know things that you have not even considered. This person is your safe person; you will not look “dumb” to them; their job is to answer all of your questions – even the “dumb” ones.

I think this illustrates the need for clear communication of the role and purpose at the beginning of the relationship between the mentor and new teacher. Mentors and new

teachers need time to sit down and discuss their expectations; this is “essential” for the mentoring process (Kajs et al., 2001). Kate at one time said, “I guess I don’t know what questions to ask her.” It is crucial that the role of the mentor is made clear to the new teacher (Cross, 1995). Who is this person and why are they here? This person is here to help, not to judge or criticize, but to support and assist (Eick, 2002; Halford, 1998). According to the mentor, that was what her role was – she was there to make Kate look good, but it took Kate a while to fully realize that, if she ever fully realized it; and, Kate at one point felt that her mentor was nice but pointless. When Kate said that the one question she was afraid to ask her mentor was, “What is your purpose?” this speaks volumes as to the miscommunication of expectations between the mentor and Kate. The new teacher is drowning those first few days and weeks – it is important they know that the mentor is there to benefit the new teacher (Trubowitz, 2004). The new teacher should not be wondering half-way through the year what the purpose of the mentor is. A mentoring program cannot be effective to induct new teachers if new teachers do not understand its purposes.

Another thing to address about this district’s mentoring program was the timing of the mentor’s initial visit to the new teacher. The beginning of the school year is a critical time for new teachers. This is when they need the most support as they get started (Trubowitz, 2004; Cross, 1995). They have the largest learning curve at this point. They need help finding the copy room, the restroom, the cafeteria, the front office. Where do I do this? Who do I talk to about this? When do we have to be here? Where do we sign in? How do I set up my grade book? How should I arrange my

room? Who is the nurse, the librarian, the counselor? Where are the teachers' restrooms? Where do I laminate? Do I have to turn in my lesson plans? What am I teaching the first six weeks – first week – first day? How do I get my whole lesson plan to fit in this little tiny box? The list of questions runs endless and all of them need answering before the first day of school. Kate's hiring occurred only two days before the teachers reported back to school, and her mentor did not appear on the scene until several weeks into the year; and then when she did show up, Kate remembered it as a "blur" – she felt clueless about this woman and did not realize this person's purpose was to help her. It is vital to establish this relationship early – before the kids show up and carry the new teacher through those difficult first days and weeks. More than once, Kate said, "I needed her more last semester." Watkins (2005) said, "New teachers cannot be left to figure things out in a vacuum" (p. 83). It seems to me that in the first few weeks of school Kate was left to figure things out in a "vacuum" and when help did arrive – she could not even recognize it.

The relationship between the principal and the mentor is vital to the success of the mentor and her efforts (Trubowitz 2004; Moir, 2009), as illustrated by a comment made by Kate's principal, "If I had someone who was not of her quality, then I wouldn't let them come because it could be counter-productive." The principal is the instructional leader of the campus and her role is vital to effectiveness of mentoring program (Moir, 2009). The mentor comes as an outsider to the campus, so it is imperative that she feels welcomed by both the new teacher she mentors and especially by the campus administration. The tone of acceptance, set by the principal, sets the tone for everyone

else on the campus. Moir (2009) said, “By working together, principals and mentors can create environments where teacher learning is supported and students benefit” (p. 17).

The campus mentor needs to feel comfortable to talk to and work with the content-area strategist as she supports the teachers in each of their different subject areas. Kate’s mentor, on this campus alone, works with the P.E. teacher, math and science teachers, and ELA and social studies teachers. The mentor cannot possibly understand fully the intricacies of each of these subject areas especially when she herself has not taught each of these subjects, at this grade level. She must feel free to work with and through the instructional strategist, who serve as the reigning experts in their respective fields for the campus. The principal and the strategists work at the campus on a daily basis, while the mentor only comes weekly; the mentor needs a healthy working relationship with the content-area strategist. Although the mentor’s work, in this case, was not and could not be directly tied to the evaluation of the new teacher, the fruit of it would most definitely affect the performance of the new teacher and ultimately student achievement (Anthanasēs & Achenstein, 2003; Cheng 1996; Halford, 1998; Thompson & Smith, 2004) and therefore the evaluation of the teacher; otherwise, what is the point of the mentoring program? Kate’s principal said she approaches this with an attitude of, “Can we all work together,” to help new teachers. The mentor said, “Our goal is to promote the success of the teacher,” and according to the district’s website this mentoring program “helps ensure that teacher’s new to the district are comprehensively inducted into the district and are knowledgeable with regard to district curriculum and instruction guidelines to provide a quality educational experience to each student in their

classroom.” The work the mentor does with the new teacher directly effects classroom instruction, which will affect the evaluation of a teacher. That being said, the principal and the mentor must have a healthy relationship so that the mentor can work effectively with the new teacher and through the instructional specialists to help the new teacher with content specific issues.

Something I cannot ignore is Kate’s overwhelming desire for a campus mentor. She said repeatedly that she wanted a person, on campus, who was willing and open to Kate and to her daily questions and concerns. Kate expressed that often she had a question her mentor might be able to assist her with, but she had it answered by the time her mentor arrived for her weekly visit. Kate wanted someone right there the moment she had a question or concern – she did not have time to wait until her mentor made her weekly visit. Many new teacher concerns are immediate concerns that need answering in the moment. How can a mentor answer these questions when she only comes once a week? According to Athanases and Achinstien (2003), “Mentors need to know things about particular students in a teacher’s class rather than being merely a drop-in visitor to a class unknown to him or her” (p. 224). Kate expressed a desire for a campus mentor and it was something she often shared with me. Kate talked about the need for a “teacher that is assigned to me that I am allowed to be annoying to.” The mentor also expressed that she felt new teachers needed someone whose job it was to find them, not someone they had to find. This supports Farrell’s (2003) findings that additional support is needed, besides the teacher coach, and that a new teacher needs a “buddy” teacher from the campus. Furthermore, much of the research supports a new teacher having a

mentor that teaches the same subject and/or grade level, on the same campus, in close proximity to the new teacher (Abu Rass, 2010; Division for Educator Workforce, 2001; Renard, 2003; Tillman, 2005; Zimpher & Reiger, 1988); and in two other cases, where this type of outside mentoring program was instituted, each of the new teachers had a campus mentor in addition to the outside teacher coach (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004; Sterling and Frazier, 2011).

I was floored when I asked the same question to the principal. I could not believe that she thought it was redundant to have the support of a campus mentor. It seemed to me that she was clueless – all she had to do was walk around her own building and see the need. This concurs with what Johnson (2001) said, “Often there is a lack of understanding on the part of principals regarding the importance of easing new teachers into their careers” (p. 45), and with Youngs’ (2007) findings, “The principals [in this study] exhibited little awareness of the needs of beginning teachers for curricular and instructional support” (p. 127). Kate’s principal said her expectation was that her other teachers take care of the new teachers and that her new teachers figure it out—again, “New teachers cannot be left to figure things out in a vacuum” (Watkins, 2005, p. 83). The new people do not have time to figure out who they need to ask and in this case when Kate began to ask questions she met some resistance and sometimes some differing answers. Tillman (2005) tells us that, “Principals should consider the benefits of consulting with novice teachers about their expectations of mentoring arrangements” (p. 626). I know that money is tight for many school districts across the nation, and paying a teacher a stipend for mentoring a new teacher is expensive, but is it possible to

encourage this type of support without providing stipends? Darling-Hammond (2003) said that the benefits far outweigh the costs. I served as a campus mentor for two years as a classroom teacher and I never received a dime of payment. I did it because, my principal asked and that was how our district designed their mentoring program. But I also did it because I wanted to help my fellow teachers and help their students. The students are the ones who benefit the most from effective mentoring programs. Is that not the point of what we are doing? Why do we even care about mentoring new teachers or even researching about mentoring new teachers? We do it because of the children and the education we provide for them. “Effective teaching is not intuitive” (Watkins, p. 83), and “The greatest benefits of supporting a new teacher can be found in the classroom” (Halford, 1998, p. 36); and “New teacher mentoring can challenge teachers more quickly to move past self and procedures to focus on learners” (Athanasios & Achinstein, 2003, p. 1487). We want only the best for our nation’s children and their education. New teachers are a part of teaching – we cannot survive and replenish without them. We as a profession have to do our best at inducting them into the profession so our children can receive the best possible education. When districts are considering the design and implementation of a mentoring/induction program, they need to consider the value and importance of a campus mentor – a mentoring program is not complete without them.

### **Relationship with other staff**

One of the things that made this mentoring relationship interesting was that Kate only saw her mentor once a week, sometimes for just a few minutes. I know that at one



time the district provided support at the campus level with a campus mentor, or teacher buddy, but due to budget constraints the district eliminated the campus level mentors. The debate now becomes, which is better - district level teacher coaches or campus mentors; and, which could you survive without during a budget crisis? Research shows that an effective mentoring program assigns a mentor that is at the same grade-level and/or subject-area, at the same campus and in close proximity to the new teacher (Abu Bass, 2010; Division for Educator Workforce Research, 2001; Renard, 2003; Tillman, 2005; Zimpher & Rieger, 1988;). This district made the choice to eliminate the stipend paid to campus mentors and keep the district level “teacher coaches” as a way to help induct the new teachers into the profession, probably relying on the principal to provide some type of campus support through either an informal (unpaid) “buddy” assignment or through team members or instructional strategists. One study found that even with a formal full release mentoring program, new teachers still needed support from a fellow teacher, on campus, a “buddy” who could be a “critical friend who coaches and guides the new teacher while acting as a protector by shielding his/her protégé from potentially damaging contact with others in the school” (Farrell, 2003, p. 107).

Kate’s principal did not feel it necessary to assign an unofficial buddy. Kate’s principal said that she expected Kate’s team and team leader and the reading strategist to help Kate, as well as the other ELA teachers. I do not think the principal ever communicated those expectations to the other staff members or to Kate, based on Kate’s perceptions of the help she received. The principal had a hands-off approach and said that her teachers “soon figured out” how to find help – she said this was a part of their

“professional development”. Watkins (2005) said, “The principal has to work with the staff to develop a community of learners who work toward common goals” (p. 83).

Anhorn (2008) said, “Fellow teachers, support staff ... need to be informed of the importance of their role in supporting the new professional educator” (p. 21). Youngs (2007) said, “Elementary principals can promote new teachers’ professional growth ... by facilitating their work with mentors and other colleagues” (p. 126). When Kate did approach the reading strategist for help, Kate felt the reading strategist assumed Kate knew nothing and was completely incompetent – confirming the worst fear of any new teacher seeking help. I found it interesting, when I interviewed the principal, how she used other staff members, such as the reading strategist, to do walk-throughs and communicate back to the principal their findings. Kate picked up on this and instead of seeing it as a form of support Kate viewed the reading strategist as a “spy”.

Consequently, she decided to never go to the reading strategist for help again. This is unfortunate because this is one of the people who could provide the most help to a new teacher, especially in terms of curriculum and lesson planning. Kate repeatedly said that no one made an open effort to appear available to help her, and her perception was that everyone was too busy with their own work – which may be grounded in some truth, as many of these teachers, although they were experienced, were new to teaching fifth grade. I speculate that several of the teachers felt the same as Kate and they might have all benefitted from speaking openly and freely amongst themselves. Another concern Kate had was that she did not want anyone to think she did not know what she was doing. This is a common for any novice, in any field, but how can we learn if we do not

ask? This fear was only exacerbated by the reading strategist's reaction to Kate's seeking.

The principal told me that she also expected the team leaders and teammates to help the new teacher. Kate was the only ELA teacher on her team that taught an English only class. Several times she talked about how she could not use the materials given to her by her teammate because they were in Spanish. Kate needed help from another English only ELA teacher. Kate also described her team leader as being more "freaked out" than her most of the time – how can this person provide help to Kate when she cannot seem to get her own act together? As far as other people on campus, according to Kate, no one freely offered help. I think the principal needed to have done a better job of communicating her expectations to the team leaders, all the ELA teachers, and especially the reading strategist if she was relying on them to assist the new teachers. A campus mentor could have helped ease some of this for Kate, someone who was an established member of the campus who could assist the new teacher as she learned to work the ins and outs of the personalities and expectations for this campus.

One thing that I saw, that seemed like a missed opportunity, was that all of these teachers were teaching fifth grade – they were all teaching the same grade level, and were all preparing these students for the same state exam. I think the reading strategist could have facilitated planning sessions where all of the ELA teachers came together to plan and discuss ideas or strategies that worked or to bounce new ideas off of each other. There could have been some real collaboration that benefitted the whole school. During one of my visits to the campus, they began the day with an all school assembly, where

one teacher and her class presented a color-coding system they used to analyze the reading passages – it was brilliant! I nudged Kate and asked her if she ever talked to that teacher about this system. Kate said she never talked to this other teacher. During one of our later interviews I asked Kate more about this teacher and if Kate had talked to her; Kate said that teacher only had one student not pass the state exam during the first round of testing. I encouraged Kate to go talk to that teacher and find out what she did. I felt like this was a missed opportunity. Here is one teacher with a brilliant idea that never left her classroom and only benefited her own students – this is the type of idea that could be shared across the campus with every ELA teacher. “Collaboration among us is a must. ... Teachers learn from each other. ... Peer learning among small groups of experienced and qualified teachers seemed to be the most powerful predictor of student achievement over time” (Berry et al., 2011, p. 71). This is where the work of the principal, as the instructional leader, and the reading strategist, as the subject expert, is vitally important to facilitate collaboration amongst the teachers. The principal must establish a culture where this is possible. Having too much of a hands-off approach and relying on other people to facilitate this on their own did not work.

As far as Kate’s relationship with her principal – when she described her administrators as “ghosts” – I thought how telling. This is similar to a response one new teacher made in a study by Tillman (2005), when the new teacher said that, “She was unsure whether ‘he knows who I am’ and what the principal expected of her” (p. 618); and in a study by Anhorn (2008), a group of new teachers, “Had high expectations of their principals and were seriously disappointed in the principal’s role in their first year

of teaching” (p. 18). The principal is the instructional leader of the campus, she is Kate’s evaluator, and how can she lead her campus when she is not walking around? A new teacher may or may not have a mentor, but she will have a principal. The teacher/principal relationship is vital to the feelings of acceptance by the new teacher, especially since in this case there was no campus mentor. A huge part of one’s induction into campus life is the relationship with her principal. Tillman (2005) said, “New teachers should feel confident that their principals are committed to their professional growth and development” (p. 626) and that “Principals should be actively involved in mentoring first year teachers” (p. 625). Something Kate expressed was that she could handle the criticism of her principal if the principal recognized the good Kate had done and if Kate felt supported. “If you come in at least have a relationship with me before you shoot off this terrible objective assessment.” “You are the boss with people under you. They need to know that you are there. ... I need to feel like someone’s got my back.” This matches the conclusions made by Anhorn (2008), “First-year teachers see the principal as the central figure in their burgeoning career; from the principal, the first-year teachers need feedback on their teaching methods; they need support on discipline and parent issues” (p. 21). How can a teacher feel a part of the campus if they do not feel supported and backed up? This principal also talked about using other people to help with the walk-throughs. I know that working through people and delegating is helpful for running a school, but it seemed to be overdone here – to the point where Kate viewed one of these other people as a “spy” and her principal as a “ghost”. If someone on your staff refers to you as a ghost, then maybe you are not in your teachers’

classrooms enough. Johnson (2001) said that one of the best ways to discourage new teachers is to not help them or monitor their progress; furthermore, a new teachers' enthusiasm is "dampened" when it seems as if their administrators do not care. Also, this principal relied on the whole staff to help new teachers, yet this did not seem to be happening from Kate's perspective. Seeing the principal's expectations carried out requires the principal to be out and about walking around the campus – this is something that requires hands-on work. If the principal was out and about on the campus more, she might have perceived the problems arising between the staff and the reading strategist – from Kate's perspective the principal simply believed whatever the reading strategist said and never followed up personally. Kate perceived a favorites line and she knew the reading strategist was on one side and she was on the other.

Also, Kate perceived that she was not always welcome in her principal's office. Youngs (2007) said, "Elementary principals can promote new teachers' professional growth in their direct interactions with them" (p. 126). Tillman (2005) said, "Principals should make new teachers feel welcome by conveying the message that they are valued members of the school community, and that as instructional leaders principals will take the time to support every new teacher" (p. 627). New teachers already feel hesitant – there does not need to be any barriers between them and their administration, here is where the role of a campus mentor could be helpful. The mentor teacher has an established relationship with the principal, and she could ease the concerns and hesitations of the new teacher, assuring her when she needs it. We see that Kate did begin to feel better about her relationship with her principal, but this was because of

Kate's efforts. Kate made an intentional decision to talk to her principal. This is not something every new teacher is willing to do, but this is something the principal should be willing to do.

Kate did begin to feel a part of the campus because of her team teacher. Sharing the same kids helped them learn to rely on each other. Every new teacher needs someone - a peer that they can rely on and lean on for emotional support. For Kate that was her team teacher – this could have been a campus mentor. Kate said, about Ashley her team teacher, “No matter how stressed out I was I knew there was someone there with me.” This confirms what other studies have shown about new teachers and their relationships with fellow novices. In one study of new teachers they said about their relationships with fellow novices, “Everyone is going through the same thing, being able to share experiences from the classroom and share ideas ... support, encouragement, and trust are key” (Thompson & Smith, 2005, p. 78). In another study, two new teachers felt they were “co-mentoring” each other and could not imagine their first year without their partner and the study found, “New teachers may have a greater willingness to trust and share with a peer of almost equal status and experience ... [but] veteran teachers are still needed as mentors in teaching techniques and advice that comes through experience” (Eick, 2002, p. 903). New teachers benefit from peers with a similar level of experience, but this relationship cannot replace that of a mentor teacher who is an experienced veteran. A campus mentor could be this person. As a district plans their mentoring program, they cannot hope that each new teacher will be lucky enough to find that special person – they need to be intentional about finding these people. As Kate's

mentor said, “I believe it is intimidating as a new person,” and, “I really feel that you need a person on your campus that is your buddy – not the person you have to find, but the person that finds you.”

### **Relationships with students and parents**

According to Kate’s principal, she looked to hire teachers that “could make an effort to form a relationship with the kids,” but, “as far as dealing with different ethnicities, we don’t address it.” She continued, “The biggest thing – ethnicity doesn’t matter – it is the socio-economic that makes a difference.” I found it interesting that the school did not specifically address the race and culture of their students, and, based on what the mentor told me as well, it did not seem as if the district spent a lot of time or energy addressing issues of race and culture with their teachers. According to the TEA, during the 2009-2010 school year, this district had only about 15 percent White students, with 63 percent Hispanic students, and just over 65 percent of their teaching staff was White (TEA, 2010). Kate’s campus, according to the principal, had nearly 85 percent Hispanic students, yet they did not address race and culture? Based on my interviews, I speculate that this district and Kate’s principal had a “color-blind” approach to dealing with differing ethnicities and tried to deflect the issue by “blaming” the performance gaps on socio-economic issues rather than race or culture. This does match some of the research that says there is an unawareness of and sometimes a resistance to seeing White dominance and racism in our schools (Hyland, 2005; Kailin, 1999); furthermore, this thinking fails to see that if we allow ourselves to be trapped into thinking that “color-blindness” is the answer to address race/culture in our schools, then we will only



continue the current system of White dominance and ignore the needs of our students of color and negatively affect their achievement (Futrell, 2004; Gordon, 2005; Kuykendall, 1991; Oates, 2003; Tettegah, 1996). McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) referred to this as an “equity trap” of “racial erasure” where a school essentially “erases” race by focusing on other issues such as socio-economic status, as McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) stated:

We define this concept [racial erasure] as the notion that by refusing to see color, by acting as if we can erase the race of those of color, and by prioritizing other factors – such as economics – over race, we can deny our own racism. (p. 613)

They went on to say, “... the assertion of color blindness is a rhetorical move (conscious or unconscious) that covers or hides an unwillingness to address race and racism”

(McKenzie & Scheurich, p. 614). Rains (1998) believed that this “color-blindness” is often viewed as benign, but it is actually harmful because it allows the dominant culture to remain in denial about their racism and dominance, and maintain the status quo. She said, “It is this status quo maintenance, in conjunction with White privilege, which makes racism more difficult to eradicate” (Rains, 1998, p. 82).

I do find it interesting that the district, which had a majority of students of color, mainly Hispanic, only 15 percent White students, and with a teaching staff of 65 percent White, did little training in terms of dealing with cultural diversity. When I asked specifically about diversity training the principal, the mentor, and Kate all referred to the Capturing Kid’s Heart training provided by the district; but according to the principal and the mentor, this training focused on treating all students with respect and building relationships with students, but did not specifically address dealing with students from

different cultural backgrounds. Also, focusing on the socio-economic issues, as Kate's principal suggested, allowed this school to deflect the blame for low student performance. As McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) said:

Then, by blaming the students' lack of success on the economic conditions in which the students were living, that is, attributing their students' lack of success to an overarching societal ill of poverty, the teachers could absolve themselves of any culpability for the low academic performance of their students. (p. 614)

It is my belief, that in order to show respect to all of your students and provide effective instruction, teachers must be aware of and acknowledge their own beliefs about their race/cultural identity and explore and understand the race/cultural identity of their students as well as their employees. Also, it is important to note that Kate's mentor was an African-American working in this "color-blind" district. It was interesting that this did not seem to be an issue for her during our interview. As I mentioned, Kate never informed me that her mentor was Black and I did not discover this until I met her mentor. This only confirms the notion that this school district held a "color-blind" perspective – race was so "invisible" that an African-American woman seemed unaware or undisturbed by her district's lack of cultural awareness. This is similar to what McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) said, "These [equity] traps are both individual and collective, often reinforced among administrators and teachers through formal and informal communication, assumptions, and beliefs" (p. 603). By not addressing race and culture the district maintained the status quo and kept their employees from seeing or addressing issues that the differing race/culture groups brought with them. How Kate's

mentor really felt about this issue I do not know. Kate's mentor was not the subject of this study, and the interview with her was used as a part of the triangulation process; maybe this part of the story might be one to be further explored in future research.

Also, it surprised me to know that the university that Kate attended did not require her to complete any courses that dealt specifically with diversity issues. This concurs with Delpit's (2008) assessment that, "At the university level, teachers are not being educated with broad strokes necessary to prepare them properly for the twenty-first century" (p.181). Kate's university education program, like many across the nation, had White professors, and all of the students in Kate's program were also White. According to Gordon (2005), "Programs staffed by predominately White faculty members runs the risk of adopting colorblind (resistant) approaches to race that reinscribe White privilege" (p.148). Howard (1999) said, "Too often we place White teachers in multicultural settings and expect them to behave in ways that are not consistent with their own life experiences, socialization patterns, worldviews, and levels of racial identity development" (p.4). How can teachers begin to understand and address racial and cultural issues without any training in that area? I believe, in conjunction with other research, that pre-service training of teachers must address racial and cultural differences and include courses that help prospective teachers understand their own race/cultural identity and the race/cultural identity of their students (Delpit, 2006; Howard, 2003; Kailin, 1999; Marx & Pennington, 2003; Raible & Irizarry, 2007; Tettegah, 1996). If White educators fail to realize that cultural differences exist between themselves and their students and fail to understand how these differences affect their

relationships with students and parents, then we will continue to fail our students of color (Marx & Pennington).

Kate met her principal's requirement for teaching, in that her main motivation for teaching involved helping children and making a difference in their lives. Kate admitted that she was naïve about her students' lives outside of school, as they dealt with many issues she did not deal with as a child. Kate's unawareness of her White identity came through when she talked about how the parents and children probably were more concerned about her age than her race and when she thought that they probably just assumed that all teachers were White. This is in line with what Rains (1998) said, "Whites do not conceive of themselves in racialized terms" (p.80), and, "This belief that 'White is the norm' is so engrained it remains obscure from view, as natural as the air we breathe but do not see" (p. 80).

Also, Kate noticed how this year as a teacher, versus last year as a student teacher at the same campus, she was more invested and more aware of her students' home lives and economic situations. She also blamed many of her students' academic and behavioral issues on their "bad" situations at home. Yet, she also recognized that, with most of her students being Hispanic, she definitely lacked a full knowledge of their culture, and she was eager to learn and participate in some activities. She demonstrated that by attending personal events, such as a birthday party and a christening of a sibling of one of her students, as well as making an effort to find the snacks they liked and serve them at their class party. I believe that Kate's desire to help her students and her ability to form meaningful relationships with them helped bridge some of the cultural gaps.

This concurs with Kuykendall's (1991) belief that, "An excited, understanding, and caring teacher can bond with a student, regardless of background, language, race, or culture" (p. 52), but she still fell short of really understanding her position in the dominant culture. If there had been some discussion of race and cultural issues within her district and/or her university program, Kate's eagerness might have been a good starting point for her larger understanding of the racial/cultural diversity of her school and the issues with White dominance.

I think that Kate's comments about her perceptions of her students' parents and their seeming lack of interest in their children's behavior revealed that she lacked a good understanding of the culture her students came from and that Kate assumed that the parents were just uninterested. Some of her assumptions may be right, but Kate did admit to not fully understanding the culture of her students. I think that played into her assumptions about the parents and their behaviors. This supports Milner's (2003) conclusion, "That teachers may blame the diverse students or even their parents for their disparities and variations" (p. 176). During one of our interviews, I addressed the language barrier separating Kate and her students' parents. Kate knew that many of her students' parents spoke little or no English – I challenged her to think that maybe the parents were not helpful with homework because the homework was in English and the parents might not be able to assist, due to their inability to read English. This is something all educators need to be aware of – if the parents do not understand English, either in spoken or written form, they cannot help their children with their homework. It may not be that they do not want to help or that they do not care, but they simply are

unable to help. I challenged Kate by asking her to imagine what it would be like if she moved to a foreign country and sent her children to the public schools there, which communicated everything in the native language of that country, how would she feel? Would she be able to help with homework? Would she feel motivated to go to the school and begin asking questions or meet with the teacher? How would she feel about parent conferences? I speculate that some of the parents that Kate dealt with may have felt intimidated because of the language barrier. Kate's school did well to send every form of written communication home in both English and Spanish and to employ many bilingual staff members. It also appears that the culture was that the bilingual staff members knew and understood the expectation placed on them and they willingly helped fellow staff members, such as Kate, when they needed help communicating with parents.

With the help of the bilingual staff Kate had the opportunity to communicate with all of her students' parents, and there were times that she took advantage of that, but she admitted that she had not communicated with some of her students' parents at all. In her mind, if they did not take that initiative then she was not going to either – putting the blame for lack of communication on her students' parents and not on herself. McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) referred to this equity trap as “paralogical beliefs and behaviors”. They said, “It is false reasoning that involves self-deception” (McKenzie & Scherich, p. 624), and that, “The teachers concluded, thus, that their own behavior as adults was not their fault or responsibility” (p. 624). McKenzie and Scheurich use this idea in speaking about how teachers blame their behavior on their students, but I think it can be appropriately applied here as well when addressing Kate's behavior in

relationship to her students' parents. Kate deflected the blame for her lack of communication with the parents onto the parents themselves, saying that if they had made an effort to communicate then she would have as well. The reality is that it is the teacher's responsibility to establish communication with the students' parents.

One issue to also address here deals with the notion that these students came to school with a deficit because of their lives at home; in reality, some of the negative issues that Kate thought her students experienced at home are not exclusive to poor families of color. Some of these perceived problems exist even in homes with White wealthy families. Also, with this deficit thinking there is the idea that these students come to school lacking something because of their race and socio-economic status. Some might even approach this situation with a "missionary" mindset, thinking that because of the students' circumstance at home, they, the educator, has come to "save" their students. Kate exhibited behaviors in line with this perspective. It is not wrong to feel compassion for your students, but there needs to be an awareness that some of these students come to school having faced sometimes difficult situations, but they still bring something of value with them. This is an equity trap that McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) refer to as a "deficit view". The idea being that the students walk in the school building with a deficit, as if they lack something, instead of recognizing what they do bring with them – their assets. McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) said, "The point ... is to move teachers away from thinking about their students in deficit ways and move toward thinking of their students in assets-based ways" (p. 612). Students of color come to school with a wealth of experience and value. Their experiences may differ from those

of the dominant culture, but these experiences still have value. The problem is that members of the dominant culture fail to see these assets because they are deeply steeped in their own culture. Howard (1999) said, “Members of the dominant group in society do not necessarily have to know anything about those people who are not like them,” (p. 12), and so they are able to remain blind to the existing value in what those of color bring to the table. Also, as Rains (1998) said, “[Color blindness] denies persons of color their right to have their own identities as well as the values, histories, contributions, language and richness of [their] identities” (p. 93). The truth is that yes, some students come to school having experienced difficult challenges in their lives, but that does not mean that they have no assets and that does not mean that they are incapable of academic success. Many of these students show resiliency by being there. It takes courage and strength to come to school and learn when facing difficulties, and then sometimes schools add insult to injury by subjecting these students to the dominant culture of White privilege and institutional racism. Students from cultural backgrounds other than White are capable of academic success. This is the lens through which educators and students of color need to view the academic experience, failing to do so only perpetuates the culture of inequity. We need to believe “in the possibility that all students of color can achieve and that we [educators] can have the ability and the will to make this happen” (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 603). And to add to that as Kuykendall (1991) said, “Teachers must help students to understand and appreciate the fact that success is very definitely part of the Black and Hispanic experience” (p. 58).



As far as dealing with her students, I believe that Kate's personality and character made it possible for her to build meaningful relationships with her students. Kate came willing to learn about her students and the things that they liked and she was not afraid to involve herself in the outside lives of her students when they invited her. She admitted that she failed to fully understand their culture and willingly worked to increase her knowledge and participation. She saw value in what her students brought with them culturally. A teacher's awareness of cultural differences benefits all students (Kuykendall, 1991). It also allows the teacher to realize that some things are just different and not necessarily right or wrong. Knowing that could save a teacher from some frustrations and get the teacher moving in the right direction towards building rapport with students and parents. Building rapport involves showing the students that the teacher cares. Teachers show they care by taking an interest in students and their lives, acknowledging value in the students and their culture. When a teacher is aware of the differences and similarities that she and her students share then she can begin to build that relationship. Any teacher, of any color, teaching students of all colors, could benefit from working to build rapport with their students. Kate mentioned one time that she knew that if she had a good relationship with her students, then they would not want to disappoint her. Kate told me that the Capturing Kids' Hearts training emphasized if you capture a child's heart then you can capture their mind. I speculate that this training coupled with Kate's character and willingness helped Kate achieve this on some level. I conclude that all teachers should work to build relationships with students. I believe this not only benefits the academic performance of the students, but it could help them in

other areas of their lives as well. Achieving this involves a keen awareness of one's own lack of knowledge and a willingness to increase one's knowledge deficiencies. This is congruent with what Delpit (2006) said, "However I have learned from interviews and personal experiences with teachers from communities of color that many of these individuals believe teaching begins instead with the establishment of relationships between themselves and their students" (p. 139), and that for one teacher she studied, "Rather than resorting to the power rooted in her role as a classroom teacher, she drew upon her sense of emotional affiliation with them" (p. 143). Delpit continued that in order for a teacher to build a relationship with their students they need to, "Connect with the families and communities from which their students come" (p. 179). Lawrence and Tatum (1997) said, "It makes sense that teachers who want to effect change would begin by trying to improve communication between themselves and their students" (p. 167). Griffith and London concluded (1980), "Perhaps one small step that educators can take in pointing out pathways to achievement is to reach out to their students; teach them and lead them" (p. 146).

In regards to the role Kate's mentor played in Kate's perceptions of her relationship with her students, in this case, it had very little impact. Kate still formed meaningful relationships with her students without the help of her mentor, but I suspect that if Kate enlisted her mentor's help in this issue she would have provided some help. My hope was to show that mentoring played a significant role in how a White teacher perceived her relationship with her students. This study did not show that. I think that the structuring of the mentoring program and the district's color-blindness approach

limited the influence of the mentor on Kate, and I continue to believe that a mentor could play a significant role in how a White teacher perceives her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus. But, I suspect, to increase this likelihood the mentor would need an awareness of her own race/cultural identity, the race/cultural identity of her mentee, and how this influences their relationship. This could be the topic of further studies, as I have found, there is little research on how mentoring, specifically affects White educators and their enculturation at diverse campuses.

I also speculate that if Kate had a campus mentor, maybe even one who was Hispanic, Kate could have benefitted from the help, in terms of building relationships with her students and their parents and understanding their culture. Starnes (2006) said, “Building effective mentoring relationships across cultural lines requires a serious commitment of time, energy, and patience on both sides” (p. 388). Delpit (2006) also talked about the need for teachers to reach out to other staff members when dealing with students of color. She said, “I have found that if I want to learn how best to teach children who may be different from me, then I must seek the advice of adults – teachers and parents – who are from the same culture as my students” (p. 102). This might be something that a future study could address, White educators having mentors of color to assist with their understanding of their students’ culture.

### **Enculturation into the profession of teaching**

I feel this mentoring program did not provide much support for Kate in dealing with the day-to-day issues of teaching. Kate often expressed how her student teaching experience failed to fully prepare her for all that was required of her. Kate mentioned

several times that with student teaching she just showed up and did what her cooperating teacher told her to do – never seeing the work behind the scenes. This may have been an issue specific to the two cooperating teachers Kate worked with, but a future study might take a look at the teacher preparation programs and the requirements of a student teaching program. If other teachers, such as Kate, enter the profession feeling inadequately prepared for the full job, here is where mentoring could play an important role. Mentoring new teachers only enhances the preparation a teacher receives from their pre-service training (Darling-Hammond, 2003) and, “Support and assistance must continue throughout the first year” (Johnson, 2001, p. 48). Kate mentioned that she needed help with many of the day-to-day duties – from lesson planning to discipline to keeping track of all of the paperwork. She specifically mentioned the paperwork involved with field trips. She talked about as a student teacher she showed up the day of the field trip and knew that her cooperating teacher had a folder with all the permission slips and other forms, but Kate never saw how much time and energy the cooperating teacher spent before the field trip getting all of that paper work in order. Kate simply showed up and it was all done. Here is where a mentor, especially a campus mentor, could prove very helpful. A mentor could have helped Kate work through every step of the field trip and helped Kate understand the amount of time and energy it would take.

Kate also talked about lesson planning – it was not that Kate could not read a curriculum guide and follow it – she wanted to know how to make the lesson move from the textbook to her students. At times Kate felt unsure what the curriculum guide asked her to do. She felt as if she could not ask for help or she would be viewed as

incompetent. Then with other lessons she wanted to be more creative and try some other activity to teach the same concept – here is where a mentor, preferably one in the same subject area, could have been very helpful to Kate. They could have planned together and bounced ideas off of each other. I know that when I was a new teacher and I planned with veteran teachers, they would often say, “Oh I have a great activity for this,” or “Let’s try teaching it this way.” As a mentor teacher, I sat down with my mentee and we discussed upcoming lessons, how we should deliver the lesson, how we could assess the lesson, and how we might reteach a concept. This relationship was not me telling the mentee what to do, but us working together, and me sharing my prior knowledge. Kate did not have this. She had the friendship with her teammate and this helped her feel connected to someone on a friendship level. It also helped Kate deal with issues specific to their shared students, but Kate’s teammate taught math and science, while Kate taught English language arts and social studies – her teammate could not provide help in this area. A mentor in the same content area could have helped Kate as she worked through the curriculum and planned her lessons. Kate survived the year, but she said that it took her the whole year to figure out exactly what she was supposed to teach. Now she feels better prepared for next year, but might she have done more than survive this year? Might she even have thrived with just a little more guidance and support? Her mentor, the teaching coach, might have provided some support in this area, but it did not work well since Kate saw her mentor for only a few minutes a week – not nearly enough time to ask all of the questions and work through every issue. Many times Kate found answers to her questions by the time her mentor came for her weekly visit. In this case,

Kate survived the year and experienced some success and felt excited about returning next year.

I speculate that Kate's success rested on her character and work ethic, and her faith. Kate felt "called" to this work and possessed a willingness to perform well and to rely on her faith to strengthen and sustain her throughout the year. This was best illustrated when she said, "I would have hated my life if I didn't have Jesus." I agree with Rushton (2004) that there is a need for more research on the role one's religious beliefs and faith in God plays in their desire to teach and how it affects their success in dealing with students, and more specifically at campuses with large numbers of students of color.

I also think that Kate's positive perceptions of feeling a part of her campus came from her relationship with her teammate and Kate's willingness to intentionally form relationships with other staff members. Not all new teachers are as intentional about forming these relationships and they may lack supportive teammates. This is where the role of mentor is important, as well as the role of principal and even possibly other staff members such as the instructional strategist. Also, I think that new teachers benefit from campus mentors or a "buddy", someone who, as an established member of the staff, helps a new teacher learn the ins and outs of the other staff as well as the expectations for that campus's teachers. I think that having a mentor in the same content area is important – for Kate one of her biggest concerns involved lesson planning and finding creative ideas for lessons. Having the mentor or teacher coach from the district level is beneficial, because that person is not weighed down by teaching duties, but in this case

the amount of new teachers assigned to this teacher coach prevented the mentor from being effective with Kate. An ideal mentoring program would involve someone from the district level, such as the teacher coach, coupled with a campus mentor that helps with the day-to-day needs of a new teacher.

## **Conclusions**

Through this study I observed and discovered many new things about new teachers and their relationships with their mentors, administrators, coworkers, students and parents. Based on the data gained through this study I came to several conclusions about mentors, administrators, cultural differences, and the influence of faith and character. Below I discuss those conclusions based on my time spent with Kate, during her first year of teaching at a culturally diverse campus.

### **Campus mentors**

If there is one thing that I learned from my time spent with Kate it was that new teachers want campus mentors. On numerous occasions she shared with me, specifically, that she wanted a mentor on her campus, on a daily basis, to show her what to do, how to do it, and to provide on-going support, at a moment's notice. She felt tremendously afraid to ask for help because she did not want to be viewed as incompetent and so she often did not seek it, but she continued to long for someone, anyone to ask for help. This seems like a contradiction, but in fact one influences the other. Asking for help is difficult and humbling, yet as Kate said, a new teacher does not know everything. New teachers, like Kate, want someone, whom they feel safe with, to ask questions; and they want that help now! Not next Wednesday when my mentor

comes for our five minute visit, no, they want that help the moment they are in need. This requires having a mentor on the same campus, on a daily basis. Even Kate's mentor felt that new teachers needed someone – a buddy - that found them, not someone they had to find. She also acknowledged that a campus mentor was a critical piece in the mentoring process.

Induction into the teaching profession has several dimensions. There is a place for enculturation into the profession as a whole – what does it mean to be a teacher, and there is also a place for enculturation into this campus, specific. This dimension of mentoring is best done by another member of that same campus, a fellow teacher, experiencing the same directives, instructions, events, interactions with staff and students as the new teacher. Every campus has its own culture and mores, specific to that building. These can be learned best through another member of that culture, someone who lives and breathes as a full member of that society. Campus mentors are a vital part to any mentoring/induction program of a new teacher.

Not only is it important for a new teacher to have a mentor at the campus level, but also, time spent between mentor/mentee is critically important to success of relationship and purpose. This is the very thing that Kate did not have and it negatively influenced her relationship with her mentor. A mentoring program is not successful when the time spent with a new teacher seems more of a nuisance than a benefit to the new teacher herself. It is difficult to assist someone when you do not know what they need; perceiving needs of someone can best be determined through time spent with the person in need. A mentor, usually, instinctively knows some things that a new teacher



might need, but every new teacher is different and they often have needs that are specific to them and their situation. Perceiving these needs requires time. Time spent observing, talking, listening, experiencing together.

The time mentors spend with their mentees builds rapport, as they demonstrate their feelings of care and concern through their actions. It is when this rapport is built that a mentor is then in a position to speak authoritatively to a situation. Kate at one point felt apathetic to seeing her mentor because her mentor spent such a small amount of time with her. She felt annoyed by the time she spent with her mentor. This undermined her mentor's ability to effectively help Kate. For a mentoring relationship to prove beneficial time spent with the mentee is vitally important.

### **Principals and new teachers**

The relationship with the mentor is not the only important relationship needed in a new teacher's life. New teachers want a relationship with their principals and need encouragement from them. Kate repeatedly shared with me how much she wanted, and really felt she needed, a positive relationship with her principal. The principal is the instructional leader of the campus and the direct supervisor of a new teacher. New teachers, like Kate, want to know that their principals know who they are, and that their principals value them as members of the campus. This is the person to whom the teachers look; they are the face of the campus to the teachers.

Kate shared with me that she did not know if her principal would notice if she did not show up to work for three weeks; she desired a principal that would notice her. Not only did she want her principal to notice her, but she longed to please her principal.

She needed acknowledgement from her principal. She needed to know that her principal not only saw her, but saw her good work. Kate said that if her principal acknowledged the positives of her work then Kate could handle the criticism. A principal cannot be the “Great and Powerful Oz” hidden behind the veil in the front office. They need to be out and about with the teachers, seeing them, supporting them, encouraging them, training them, living life with them. Kate did not always feel safe talking to her principal and often felt as if she was bothering her principal; and even saw her principal so few times that she referred to the principal as a “ghost”. The principal is the leader of the teachers, he/she must be available and approachable to the teachers so they know that the principal sees them, cares for them, and supports them. These are the very things Kate said that she wanted from her principal.

### **Cultural differences**

Enculturation into campus life does not just involve relationships with other staff members and the principal, but also involves relationships with the students and their parents as well. My time spent with Kate showed me that the work towards creating cultural awareness in education is not done. Kate, her campus, and her district seemed to approach cultural differences through a “color-blind” lens, which created dissonance for Kate and her students and their parents. It also helped maintain the status quo and maintenance of the invisible White privilege and cultural dominance. Cultural differences frustrate all teachers, even when they remain unaware of the fact that these cultural differences are the source of their frustrations. Kate readily admitted that there were things about the culture of her students that she did not know, and I would add that

although she was aware of some of those differences, there were things that she did not know she did not know. That is repetitive intentionally – part of the struggle with cultural awareness is discovering that you do not know there are things you do not know. As some have said – those in the dominant culture view White as “normal” and cannot see that there might be multiple “normals”.

Many White teachers, like Kate are not only unaware of their cultural dominance, but they are unaware of the fact that they should be aware of their cultural dominance and how that affects their relationships with students and parents. Kate is a good person, a caring teacher who wanted to relate to her students. She could visibly see and understand that there were some differences between her and her students, but she did not see that these differences existed because she was a part of the dominant culture and that her membership in that culture caused some dissonance between her and her students and their parents because they were not members of that culture – they were the others.

White teachers, like Kate, often do not know they are members of the dominant culture and that their students of color are not members of that culture. This creates friction between them and their students, which they can feel, but they cannot always put their finger on the pulse of the problem. Many of these teachers, like Kate, want to connect with their students; they want to bridge the gap. They would not classify themselves as “racist” because they do not harbor ill feelings towards other cultural groups. They simply do not realize that some of their expectations of their students are based on their cultural perceptions of how a student or parent should behave. They

cannot see that sometimes one's cultural expectations are simply different, not right or wrong, just different. Sometimes members of the dominant culture assume that their cultural expectations are universal to all cultures; they cannot see that these expectations exist only in their culture. It does not occur to them to even question or examine these expectations through a different cultural lens. They are not meaning to demean or judge others unjustly; they simply, naively, operate from their cultural perspective.

Kate wanted only the best for her students and held great affection for them. She knew that differences existed between her and her students, but she did not fully understand those differences and the ramifications of those differences. The training provided by her district focused on respecting all students and did not directly address cultural differences, but respecting all students begins with awareness and acknowledgement of the differing cultures and how those cultures co-exist. The work to educate educators about their own culture and its effect on their instructional practices and their relationships with students and parents needs to continue. Not as a judgment against any culture, including the dominant one, but as an awareness that American schools are comprised of individuals from different cultures; and the meeting of these different cultures sometimes creates friction between teachers and students; and to bring an awareness that this friction hinders the building of relationships between teachers and their students and their students' parents; thus hindering the delivery of instruction.

I think that many White teachers are resistant to the education of and conversation about cultural differences because they feel that it is a judgment on them and their character; I know this is how I felt when I first encountered these types of

discussions. In many ways I see myself in Kate, and on some levels feel rather inadequate to speak on this topic, as I feel I am still in the learning process. When I first encountered the conversation of institutional racism it created some dissonance within me. If I accepted the premises of institutional racism then that meant that I believed that I was a racist, and everyone that I loved and cared for were racists as well. This created some pain and some denial as well. In my mind a racist was someone who intentionally sought to harm and abuse people of other colors and I certainly did not categorize myself that way. Also, I had never realized how difficult it might be for someone of color to successfully move within the social structures. I thought that working hard and working within the system was how someone achieved success, and those of color, like “normal” people, simply should do just that and would also achieve the same success. What I failed to see was the system was stacked in my favor. If I worked hard and did all of the right things I could achieve success, but people who were not of the dominant culture might work just as hard and yet never achieve the same level of success. I do want to point out that this realization does not and should not negate any achievement I have made, nor the achievement of others in the dominant culture, but it simply makes me aware as a member of the dominant culture, I can more easily navigate the through the system than someone who is not a part of that dominant culture. This realization helps me in my understanding of my place within the culture – it brings about more understanding, which heads in the right direction.

Understanding one’s culture and others’ cultures, and the differences between them is not a judgment on any culture, but I think that many White teachers feel like the

conversation on race and ethnical differences is saying that being White makes someone a bad person and that being a member of the dominant culture makes someone a bad person. That is not true. On the other hand it is important to note that understanding cultural differences between people is not saying that people from other race and ethnic groups other than White are bad people either. We are all just people. Race, ethnicity, culture, these things do not determine whether someone is bad or good – the conversation exist to bring awareness and understanding, not judgment.

Kate thought that many of her students' parents did not care about the education of their children. Maybe some of them did not care, but Kate did not and could not see that maybe the problem was a cultural one, not a lack of valuing education. This led her to judge the behaviors of her students' parents and in some cases prompted her to not even bother with communicating with some parents. How much positive influence could Kate have had if she had tried communicating with and listening to these parents, before making a judgment? We will never know. I do not want to paint Kate as a mean and judgmental teacher. I just want to show, that even caring teachers, like Kate, make assumptions about their students and their parents, based on the teacher's cultural expectations, without seeking full information; and they do this completely unaware of the cultural lens through which they look. Therefore, the work to open the cultural eyes of every teacher needs to continue so that someone's culture does not hinder them from receiving an education. It is clear from this study that the conversation about White privilege and cultural dominance is not finished, and in some regards has only just begun.

### **Influence of faith and character**

Although Kate did not have her desire fulfilled for a campus mentor, and she struggled with her relationship between her and her principal, and she remained unaware of her cultural dominance as a White teacher, she did perceive a positive enculturation into campus life. I think that this was possible because of her faith and character. From Kate's story I learned that faith and character impact a teacher's feelings of success and his/her positive perceptions of the interactions with his/her fellow teachers, students, and parents.

It was Kate's faith and her perceiving of a "call" from God that led her to this teaching position. Kate had struggles. It was not a flawless year for her and she encountered many bumps along the way, but as she said, it was her faith that sustained her through the biggest and most difficult times. I easily identify with Kate in many ways in regards to this piece of the conversation because I share the same faith as Kate. I view my work as a call and I rely on my faith for sustenance – I would not be writing this dissertation if it were not for my faith, my sense of calling, and a reliance on that faith to sustain me. Teaching is hard and it is a great deal of work. Loving other people's children when they sometimes behave in an unlovable way is not easy and can be very draining on a person. Being patient with and kind to coworkers is not always easy, but despite any difficulties Kate admittedly still loved her students and found something positive to say to each of her coworkers. Kate credited her faith for helping her work through and survive the school year and the difficult moments. Even Kate's mentor said to me that she felt that Kate's success was due to her faith and her character.

Preparing her students for the state assessment overwhelmed Kate, this prompted her and her teammate, Ashley, to meet before school to pray in the days leading up to the state assessment. Kate felt drawn to other people on her campus who shared her same faith and she drew strength from this shared faith. Kate wanted to be viewed as a light and this influenced how she interacted with her fellow staff members, her students and their parents. She was not perfect, but tried her best to do what was right and to be kind to all she encountered. This made a difference.

Kate's faith influenced her character. She wanted to be a person of integrity, someone who did the right thing, who was honest, and kind, and someone who did excellent work. These are good positive character traits regardless of faith background. It was Kate's faith that prompted her to behave in such a manner and this positively affected her relationship with others and her desire to perform well. People of faith, whether they are Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, or some other type of faith, are influenced by that faith. Their beliefs affect their behavior, often in a positive way. Kate was a good coworker and a good teacher because she was driven by her desire to be a light to her campus, and this desire was rooted in her faith. Kate continued on and kept working hard because she wanted to be successful, but there were times when she did not feel good about the job she was doing, and it was her faith that sustained her through these moments. Faith influences character, and character matters. Good teachers are kind and loving towards their coworkers, their students, and their students' parents. Good teachers have good work ethics. Good teachers are honest. Good teachers are people of character. Kate's good character was grounded in her faith. When the school



year came to a close she maintained a positive view of her work and her relationships with her coworkers, students, and their parents, and Kate would say that this was because of her faith. Faith and character matter.

### **Implications for Practice**

The purpose of this study was to understand the role mentoring plays in a White female novice teacher's perceptions of her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus. For this White female novice teacher her mentor had little influence on her perceptions of her enculturation into this campus, but there are lessons that can be applied to the practice of education from Kate's story. There are several implications for mentoring new teachers. Also, the issue of race and cultural differences cannot be ignored when looking at Kate's experiences. Kate's interaction with her Hispanic students teaches us some things about educating educators about cultural differences. Listed below are the implications for practice.

- 1) Any new teacher mentoring program is not complete without the inclusion of a campus mentor. This is something that Kate expressed several times that she wanted and needed. New teachers need help enculturating into the profession and into campus life as well. If a school district chooses to provide a teacher coach from the district level, as Kate's did, then they cannot fail to include the campus mentor as well. The program is not complete without it.
- 2) Mentors assigned from the district level, to serve as "teacher coaches" like Kate's mentor, need to be limited to mentoring a reasonable number of new

teachers, for the fullest impact of their role. Reasonable could be defined as around 15-20 teachers. Kate's mentor could not effectively mentor Kate as she had too many mentees, close to 50. It is virtually impossible to mentor that many teachers well. If a district chooses to have a mentoring program structured in this manner, it cannot overstretch its mentoring staff with too many teachers, otherwise, they will undermine the entire purpose of their program. Limiting the number of mentees to 15-20 allows the teacher coach to spend one to two hours a week with each new teacher.

- 3) Mentors need to spend ample time with their mentees. Ample time could be defined as a daily interaction with the new teacher for a campus mentor, and at least one to two hours a week for a teacher coach from the district level. It takes time to mentor a new teacher and if the proper amount of time is not given then the program is undermined. New teachers need their questions answered when they have them to have full beneficial impact to their development as teachers.
- 4) Campus mentors assigned to new teachers should teach the same subject/grade level, if possible. Kate struggled greatly with lesson planning and implementation. She repeatedly said that she wanted someone to give her creative lesson ideas and to help her understand what the curriculum guide was specifically asking her to do. This is the type of help that a mentor from the same subject/grade level could effectively provide, as he/she would be planning for the same lessons. This could provide an opportunity for new

teachers and veteran teachers to plan collaboratively, as a team, boosting the confidence and performance of the new teacher.

- 5) Principals need to play a vital role in the induction process of a new teacher.

The principal is the instructional leader of a campus and he/she must realize the influence he/she has on his/her teachers. Kate was very concerned about how her principal viewed her. She wanted to please her principal. She did not always feel her principal was approachable and even referred to her as a “ghost” at one time. Although the principal works through instructional strategist, team leaders, mentors, and other campus leaders, he/she cannot neglect to have a personal relationship with each teacher, especially the new teacher. It is when the principal builds rapport with his/her staff that he/she can authoritatively speak to the teachers and into their instructional practices. As Kate said, if her principal acknowledged Kate as a person and her success, then she could handle whatever criticism her principal shared.

- 6) Universities and school districts need to provide training on cultural differences for pre-service and in-service teachers, respectively. Kate did not receive any training on awareness of and understanding of cultural differences during her pre-service training or during her first year of teaching. It seemed that both her university and her school district took a “color-blind” approach to addressing differences in race and ethnic identity; this type of behavior only perpetuates the dissonance between cultural differences. This is a conversation that needs to be on-going for educators.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This study, like many others, does not just answer the questions asked, but also leaves the researcher asking more questions. The story of Kate tells us many things, but it also leaves us wondering others. The implications for future research are listed below.

- 1) With Kate being a White teacher teaching at a campus with a high percentage of Hispanic students, might Kate have had a different experience if her mentor had been Hispanic? If Kate had a Hispanic mentor could her mentor have helped her understand the culture of her students better? The cultural make up of each campus varies, depending on location. It would be interesting to know if a White teacher had a mentor who was of the same cultural background of the students then maybe that mentor could not only assist the new teacher with his/her enculturation into the profession, but might also serve as a liaison between the White teacher and the students of color. Kate taught on a campus with many Hispanic teachers, who taught the same grade and subject that Kate did. Any one of these teachers might have served as a campus mentor and a cultural mentor to Kate, easing her transition into the profession, campus life, and the lives of her students.
- 2) Kate and her teammate, Ashley formed a very powerful bond, and it was from this friendship that Kate drew much support. Because they were both new teachers and they shared the same students, then they both supported each other. It would be interesting to study how peer relationships, like this one, impact a new teacher and his/her perceptions of his/her enculturation

into the profession and campus life, and his/her retention. Kate's school year could have been very different if she had not had this important peer relationship. There was something about a common experience, both being new teachers, both teaching the same students, that created a powerful bond between these two teachers, that kept them both above water. It would be interesting to learn more about the dynamics and benefits of this type of relationship to a new teacher.

- 3) I think it would be beneficial to study more the role a principal has in the mentoring of a new teacher. This relationship was very important to Kate and influenced her feelings of success, support, and value to the campus. I know that the principal plays an important role to any school, but it would be interesting to see how a principal impacts a new teacher and their enculturation to the profession, as well as the campus. The principal is the instructional leader of the campus and this cannot help but impact a new teacher and his/her instructional practices.
- 4) As we look at race and ethnic identity and how cultural differences impact relationships between teachers and students, and ultimately impacts instruction, we cannot ignore that we live in a changing world. This generation of new teachers never experienced segregation, as they also did not experience the issues during the process of desegregation. As Kate said, she attended a very diverse public school herself during her K-12 years. This generation of teachers grew up seeing diversity on television. These teachers

have seen the election of the first African-American president. They have seen the first Hispanic woman to become a Supreme Court Justice. They have seen the first African-American Secretary of State, and then the first African-American woman Secretary of State. I would be curious to see how these changes in our culture affects the perceptions this generation of teachers has on race and cultural differences, as opposed to the perceptions their predecessors had. They cannot help but be different having seen what they have seen.

- 5) This study showed that Kate's faith greatly influenced her and her perceptions of her success and her relationships with her coworkers, her students, and her students' parents. I think that studying the role one's religious beliefs and faith plays in their desire to teach would help better understand what drives people to want to teach, especially at campuses with high numbers of students of color and/or students from economically disadvantaged families, and how this drive impacts their success.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

This concludes the discussion of Kate's story as a White female novice teacher and her perceptions of her enculturation into a culturally diverse campus and the role mentoring played in this. It is not that Kate had a bad relationship with her mentor, but that this relationship could not develop into an impactful one because Kate only saw her mentor once a week, for only a few minutes; not nearly enough time for her mentor to greatly influence Kate's perceptions of her enculturation into this culturally diverse

campus. Kate's mentor was overstretched with a large number of new teachers to mentor and could not effectively mentor Kate, despite what her desire might have been. The design of a district's mentoring program and the implementation of that program have an impact on the effectiveness of the mentors with their mentees. Also, Kate's greatest desire, in terms of mentoring, was to have a campus mentor; someone whom she could run to at a moment's notice for assistance. The design of this district's mentoring program did not allow for this desire to be fulfilled for Kate, leaving her wanting.

Kate's desire for assistance on a daily basis and her high value on relationships impacted her interactions with other staff members, including her principal, her reading strategists, her team, and especially her teammate Ashley. Kate struggled with her unmet expectations in regards to her relationship with her principal and this negatively impacted Kate's perceptions of her relationship with her principal and how her principal viewed her work. Kate also struggled with her relationship with her reading strategist, a person who potentially could have been a great help to Kate. The strain between Kate and her reading strategist only hindered Kate's perceptions of her enculturation. Kate's principal expected her team, especially her team leader to fill some of the mentoring gaps for Kate, but this did not happen.

Kate's relationship with her teammate, Ashley, proved vital to her positive perceptions of her school year. This relationship allowed Kate the opportunity to share some of the experiences of a new teacher with someone else who was experiencing the same thing. Without this relationship I do not think Kate would have viewed her first year of teaching as positively as she did.

Kate loved her students and sought to form meaningful relationships with them despite their cultural differences. These cultural differences did impact their relationship and more greatly impacted Kate's relationships with her students' parents. One of the biggest barriers was language, which with the help of other staff members, Kate was able to overcome that somewhat. This school district seemed to take a "color-blind" approach to addressing race and cultural differences, which I think did a disservice to Kate and her students.

Kate's love for her students, a strong desire to form positive relationships, and her faith and character made it possible for her to form meaningful relationships with her students, despite their cultural differences. Kate wanted the best for her students and wanted to be a light to the campus. She tried to be a part of her students' lives, even outside of school and this not only helped with her relationship with her students, but with their parents as well.

This study shows that new teachers want to have mentoring from someone at the campus level, as Kate expressed repeatedly. It also shows that the new teachers are greatly impacted by their relationship with their principals. Kate spent much of her time talking about her desire for a positive relationship with her principal and for her principal to recognize her successes. She wanted to feel supported by her principal. Another conclusion of this study involves the importance of the continuing education of educators and the continuing conversation about the awareness of cultural differences between teachers and students and an understanding of how this affects the development of the relationship between teachers and students. Also, this study shows how faith and



character matter. Kate's faith influenced her character and sustained her throughout the year. Her faith was the source of her drive to be the teacher and the coworker she was.

This study has several implications for the practice of education including the importance of campus mentors, the limitation of the number of mentees for a teacher coach, and the importance of the amount of time a mentor spends with a new teacher. Also, it shows that having a campus mentor, who teaches the same subject, at the same grade level might greatly impact a new teacher and her lesson planning and implementation. The principal must play a role in the mentoring of a new teacher and a new teacher needs this relationship. Finally, training for teachers on race and cultural identity could prove helpful for all teachers and cannot be ignored by taking a "color-blind" position.

This study also has implications for future research. It might be helpful to study how a White teacher having a mentor of the same cultural background of the students might potentially bridge the gap between the White teacher and her students of color. Also, it might be interesting to study how peer relationships, such as the one between Kate and her teammate, Ashley, impact a new teacher, her feelings of enculturation, and possibly her retention. Also, Kate highly valued the relationship between her and her principal, and with her unmet expectations, Kate often had negative views of this relationship. It would be interesting to study the role principals have on the mentoring of new teachers. As far as race and cultural differences and the impact new teachers, Kate, like many other new teachers live a world that reflects the cultural changes of our time and it is not the same world that their predecessors experienced. It would be

interesting to know how this generation views race and cultural differences. Finally, Kate's faith greatly influenced her in her work, it would be interesting to study further the relationship between one's faith and how this impacts their work as a teacher. Kate's story would not have been complete without sharing the importance of her faith and its influence on her as a teacher.

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